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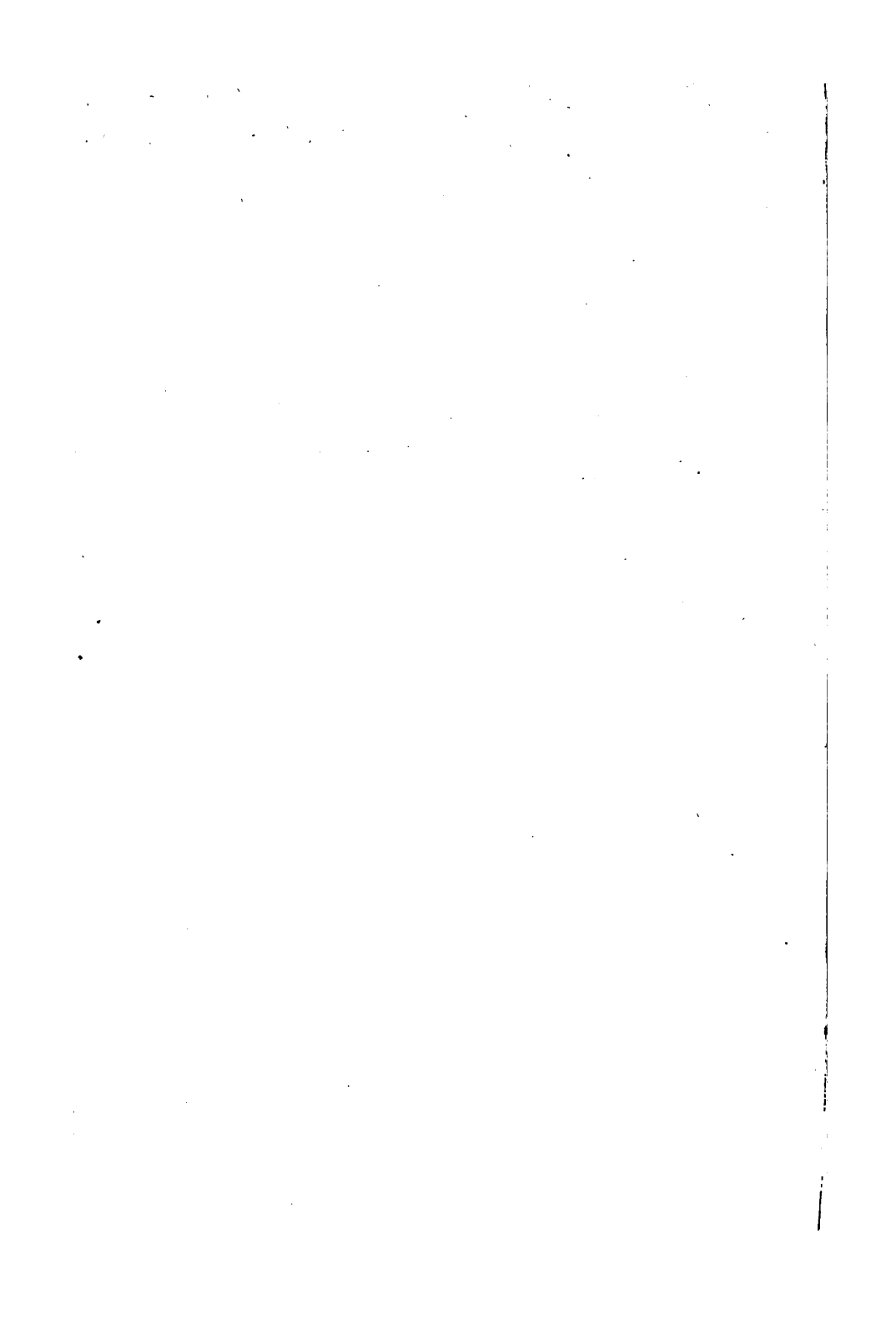
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Herod Antipas



JOHN ISTORUM





HEROD ANTIPAS

BY
JOHN ISTORUM

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

HEROD ANTIPAS.

HERODIAS, wife of Herod Philip, afterwards of Herod Antipas.

SALOME, daughter of Herod Philip and Herodias.

LUCIUS, in love with Salome.

MARCUS, a favourite of Herod Antipas.

MATTHIAS, a Court humorist.

ELEAZAR, Steward of Herod Philip.

JOHANAN, an old domestic of Herod Philip.

ZADOK, an aged Counsellor.

LORDS.

COUNSELLORS.

COURTIERS.

A CAPTAIN.

A DOCTOR.

A WARDER.

TWO SOLDIERS.

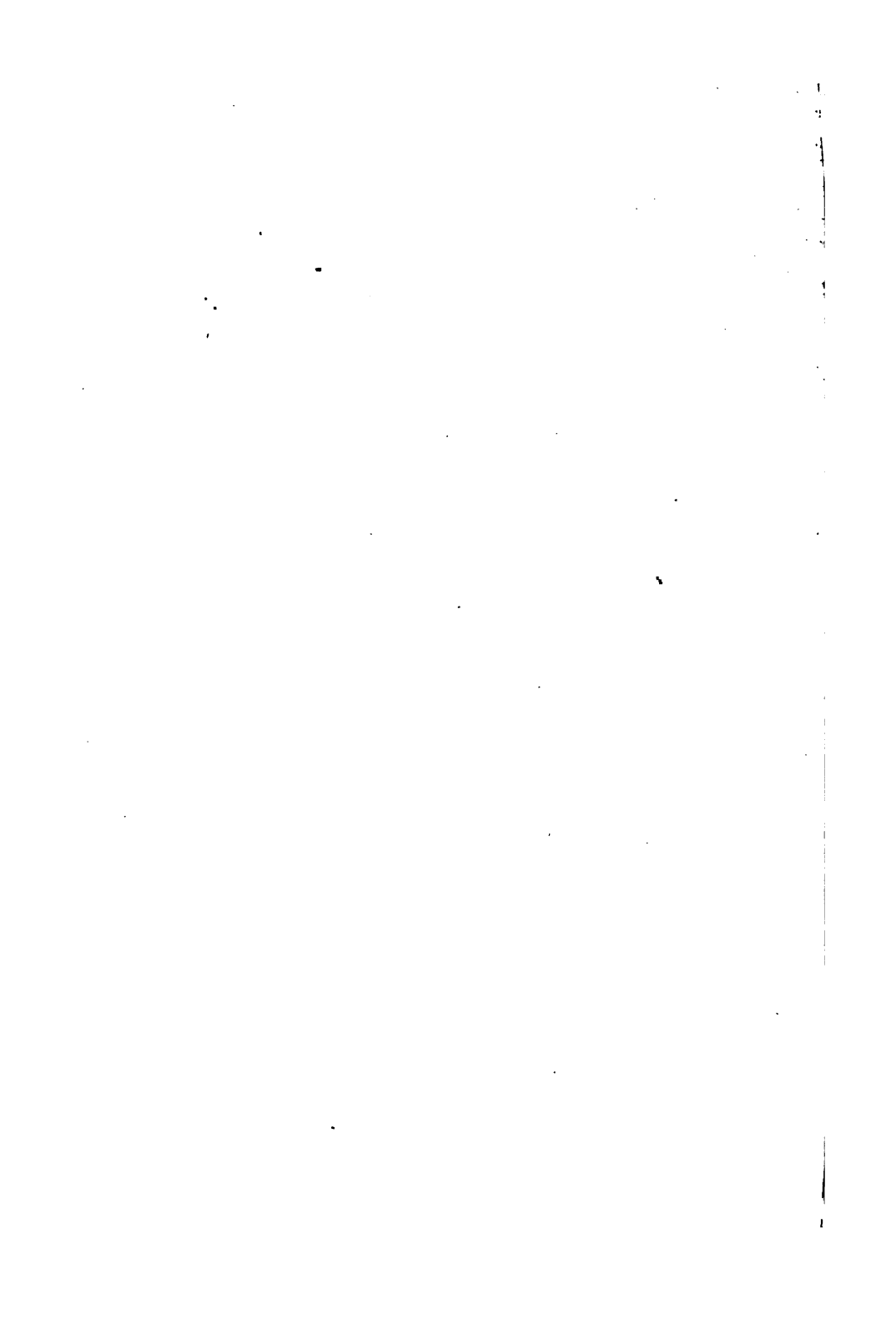
PAGES.

MIRIAM, a Waiting-maid to Herodias.

LYDIA, another Waiting-maid to Herodia.

A SIBYL.

DANCING GIRLS.



HEROD ANTIPAS.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

The house of Herod Philip.

*Enter ELEAZAR, PHILIP'S Steward; and JOHANAN,
an old Domestic.*

ELEAZAR. The times are merry, good Johanan.

JOHANAN. Ay,

Merry indeed. This house scarce knows itself.

These revels and these Pagan doings sort

But ill with my old joints. Night now is day.

For my part let me sleep o' nights.

ELEAZAR. Why, true ;

'Tis a sound theory.

JOHANAN. Theory, say you ? Yes.

Give me a bit of practice. Words and words.

Sound theory, sound ? Give me sound sleep, I say.

But here, amid this rout, one snatches food
Desperately, as a thief at noon, and sleep
By panic shreds, like a scared sailor-boy
In his first tempest.

ELEAZAR. True, my good old friend ;
But 'tis a point of wisdom, when you deal
With princes and their ways, to let your speech
Be sweeter than your thoughts. Be sib with silence.
Hatch treasons in your mind ;—your head is safe ;
But whisper one word in another's ear,
And far off in his echoing kingdom, Death
May take it as his summons unto you.

JOHANAN. God meant thee for a courtier. 'Tis
a trade
Whose gain is loss at best.

ELEAZAR. Thou hast a tongue,
Old friend, that's blunt. And yet—I would not say
So much to any other—there is truth
And wisdom in thy rough words ; I have known
For thrice seven years the weariness and ache
Of heart and limb, that are the master pay
Of a courtier's service.

(HERODIAS passes at the other end of the hall.)

Ha ! Whisht ! Didst thou see ?

JOHANAN. See? Yes, I saw. Have I not eyes?

I would

'Twere the last time they looked on that.

ELEAZAR.

Soft, soft,

I pray she heard not; but these women's ears

Are sharper than a watchdog's in the night;

Or a blind man's when peril is at hand.

I fear mischance. Last night I dream'd a bolt

Fell from the heavens upon this house, and all

That morning saw was a charr'd heap; and then

I dream'd again, and this time came a snake

And stole towards Philip's bed, and he upstarting

Shriek'd with such frantic cries that I awoke.

JOHANAN. Thou hast hit it there;—serpent and

Eve in one.

ELEAZAR. What dost thou say? Speak soft,

Johan, soft;

In a palace nought is deaf.

JOHANAN. But some are blind.

ELEAZAR. Blind! Who is blind?

JOHANAN. Those who have greatest need

To see. Is it not ever so? This house

Is but a picture of the mighty world;—

Dim, blear-ey'd Philips, such perceiving souls,

That look with great wide gaze on scheming friends

And falsen women ;—oh yes, they see, they see
Like the wise owl at noon.

ELEAZAR. Thou art bitter ; but
What hast thou seen ?

JOHANAN. Much, Eleazar, much ;
Enough to make a season'd courtier stare,
And undeceive even a king. But mum !
Nothing is deaf here.

ELEAZAR. Good, Johanen ; yet
Thou hast no fear of me, for thou hast eaten
With me at two and twenty Passovers.

JOHANAN. Fear ! Nay I fear not. But why ask
of me ?

Art thou so mole-ey'd that thou hast not seen
The ill-hid shameless wickedness that since
The coming of this Herod Antipas
Hath brought this house within the verge of hell ?
I speak not now of roystering pages, nor
Of insolent attendants, gross with meat,
Full-stomach'd and no-conscienced,—earthly brutes,
I weigh them but as biped swine. But she,
My curious courtier, she—hast thou not seen ?

ELEAZAR. Herodias ?

JOHANAN. Ay, Herodias ; that's the name.
Good walls, dear walls, I pray you now be deaf,

For my sweet courtier's sake. Hast thou not seen
The devil in her eyes, the lids down-droop'd,
But to make bolder the lascivious glance
Of the neighing tetrarch? Oh, 'tis the old game,
Hell's hide and seek, and catch me, sweet, in the
dark.

Mother and wife they call her; and the names
Smell carrion.

ELEAZAR. But has not fancy painted this in too
Deep colours?

JOHANAN. Is the sun in heaven?

ELEAZAR. If it

Be so,——

JOHANAN. I would there were but room in't for
The flimsiest if. I could tell more. But thou,
Sir Prudence, canst not harm thy sacred head
By looking. Here's a choice commodity.

Enter a PAGE.

PAGE. Most excellent, long-bearded Sir, has the
sweet vision of the lady Herodias illumined thy
venerable eyes?

JOHANAN. Sweet vision of the lady Herodias?

PAGE. Even so, most sapient. Does not such a
vision make thy old legs cut capers, and thy blood
course like a colt's in early summer?

JOHANAN. My legs feel no such temptings, Master
Page ;

And as for colt, of the wild horse or ass,
I own no kinship with them.

PAGE. Metrical, by Pollux, and not unacquainted
with jocularities ! But, Lord ! what a thing it is to be
old, when such a full-bloom'd beauty can make no
impression upon one's sluggish blood ! For my part,
now—but there, I tarry where I was bid to speed.
Excellent but wintry-blooded gentlemen, have you
seen the lady Herodias ?

ELEAZAR. The lady Herodias passed through that
door even now.

PAGE. Now, by fair Venus, I tender you the best
thanks that my haste will allow.

(Exit PAGE.)

JOHANAN. Sweet youth ! with's essences and
heathen oaths.

Thou saw'st the billet in his hand ? The powers
Of darkness never lack some silken rogue
To run their blackest errands. Oh, this crew !
Had I some mighty besom, I would sweep
The whole herd into night or ocean or
Tophet or anywhither, so it were
From here.

(Music within.)

The music sounds, the feast is spread ;
I must away. But, good my dreaming friend,
When a man sees not by the light of day,
God sends him dreams to teach him how to see.

(*Exit JOHANAN.*)

ELEAZAR. Craggy, but true. Alas, that man should
lose
The better part of self for daily bread,
Like the red-handed hunter of old days.
Keen-sighted, too, in spite of years ; and I
Have had misgivings, which I dared not speak,
Of seeming wrong. Pray God it be but seeming,
And all my dreams be only empty dreaming.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE II.

An arbour in the garden of Philip's house.

Enter ANTIPAS.

ANTIPAS. This is the place, and close upon the
hour.
I would it were less sultry. There's a weight
In the air that well-nigh stifles breath ; the flowers
Droop as in thick-drugg'd atmospheres, close-pall'd

From the sweet wind. Night's buzzing insects lie
Torpido and mute. Not even a dusky bat
Pants with his leathern lungs thro' this black heat
There's wrath in Heaven to-night, and all the world
Lies breathless, listening for some voice of doom.
How oft do Nature's moods mate ours! Ay me,
Heat on my brow, and darker heat within.
Pah! How it smells, this bower, this trysting-place,
Part furnace and part tomb, I must be out.

(Comes out.)

There is no breathing in the accursed spot.
A man must breathe even on the Devil's work.
Devil! Is there a devil? My old creed
Said No; but everything to-night says Yes.
Has not his whisper buzz'd in my ear this month
By night and day? And when I thought of home,
God, duty, and the like, why then buzz, buzz,
The louder. Devil! But who else to-night
Shakes all my heart, and even my physical frame
With the misgivings of a rapturous dread,
While here I stand upon the shuddering brink,
And long and long not?

Shall I go back? There yet is time. A few
Brief moments, and 'twill be too late for ever.
How these big choices disarray the soul!

What sound was that? Did some one whisper
"Back!"?

I was not wont to start in the dark, nor hear
Voices when none were by. They talk of angels;—
Did some good angel in this fateful hour
Brush past me with that whisper? Tut! And yet,—
Yet half I wish I could go back, and half
I would go on. Stand still, my fluttering heart,
A moment; let me breathe, or the kilny air
And fear will choke me. Ha! She comes. Too
late!

Even hell itself be welcome, now I lose
This more than hell of battling doubts within.
I am ready now for all.

Enter HERODIAS.

HERODIAS. Sweet, is it thou?
That's my brave Herod. What a night it is!

ANTIPAS. Ay! But why brave? Can I not face
the dark?

What is there that I would not front for thee?
What road too long with thy sweet voice at the end?

HERODIAS. Spoke like a prince.

ANTIPAS. And thou, thou tremblest not?

HERODIAS. No, not now.

My pulses wildly beat, but not with fear.
Night has no terrors when one is in heaven.
I never thought, but one brief month ago,
This weary garden could be paradise.

ANTIPAS. Was no one stirring?

HERODIAS. Where? I heard no sound.

ANTIPAS. Nay, start not so; I meant not here,
my queen;

But when thou camest forth.

HERODIAS. None. All was still;
Save my own heart, that beat so loud, it sounded
Like haunting steps behind me. More than once
I turned, as half expecting to behold
Some watcher. They were idle fears, that vanished
In a moment when I saw thee.

ANTIPAS. It is strange,
Such empty fancies have affray'd me more
To-night than any terrors on the field
Of perilous battle. Now they're past.

HERODIAS. Ay, past;
Think nothing more of them. Love smothers fear,
When lovers meet in passionate embrace.
This is life's brim-fill'd fulness; all besides
That I have known, has been but drop and hint
To the rich rapture of this hour.

ANTIPAS. Does no
Dread of misgiving touch thee ?

HERODIAS. Dread ! Was that
My Herod spoke ? Misgiving ! when the dawn
Of freedom is at hand ? Naught troubles me
Now but the dizziness of utter bliss.
I am half faint with joy. Come, let us speak
Of the morrow's plans ; 'twill temper the wild pain
And madness of this too delirious moment.
Let us sit within the bower.

ANTIPAS. Nay, not in there ;
Let us walk here ; 'tis cooler ; none is by ;
The wine-drench'd revellers are fast asleep ;
There's not a droning beetle will disturb us.
If thou art not too weary with these revels,
Let us walk here.

HERODIAS. Weary ? with thee ? Thy love
Is but a pale, thin-blooded thing to mine.
Love's feet would walk a trackless wilderness,
O'er sand and stone and bog with that it loves,
Till shoes were gone, and bleeding feet were worn
Clean to the bone, but Love would not be tired.
Is thy love like to that ?

ANTIPAS. Like ? yes ; and yet
Not like. Our love is as ourselves ; 'tis past

All gaugings and comparings, even as we.
 Thou art full summer ; for thy heart has drunk
 Deep of the sun's most fiercest heats, and all
 Thy being is aglow with pulsing warmth,—

HERODIAS. And that is being. Should my veins
 run water ?

One lives, thus, months in a day, and life becomes
 Many and many a life. Naught multiplies,
 Teems and creates like love.

ANTIPAS. Ah ! But restraint——

HERODIAS. Restraint ! A schoolgirl's tale,
 The dream of icy-hearted age, the dull
 Ash when the fire is spent. But dost thou fear,
 And thou a Herod ? I am but a woman,
 But I would dare an angry universe
 For thee.

ANTIPAS. My lion-hearted queen !

HERODIAS. Then be
 A lion.

ANTIPAS. So I am with thee.

HERODIAS. A lion,
 To need this spurring ! Dost thou love thy cage ?
 Aretas' daughter's silken fetters ? Or
 Perchance the lash of her revengeful sire
 Holds thee in awe ?

ANTIPAS. It is not wise, my queen,
To cut too deep, or it may reach the quick.

HERODIAS. No, no ; I would not wound. My
tongue is sharp.

Forgive me, Herod ; 'tis a woman's fault ;
Only I'd have thee more of Antipas,
And less of Philip.

ANTIPAS. Philip ? ay, poor Philip !

HERODIAS. Why poor ?

ANTIPAS. Why look you, Philip's wife, we two,
Philip and I, were brothers ; played together
Thro' the long happy days, and laid our little
Tired heads on the same pillow. Older he
Than I, and stronger ; fought my battles, schem'd
Always for me ; for me, too, many a time
He took the blame when I was wrong, and shar'd
Whate'er he had with me. How I loved then
His ringing voice and red, round, merry face !
I could look straight into his eyes, in those
Young days that seem so far and far away.
He was my better angel, as they term it ;
And now, in payment of it all, I play
The blackest devil of the pit to him.

HERODIAS. Life has scant room for these old
childish thoughts,

That plague with useless memories. The years
Push childhood back, and bring us other gifts.

ANTIPAS. Ay, but not sweeter.

HERODIAS. Sweeter? No, perhaps ;
But fuller, vaster, more accordant with
Our growth of mind and body. Men are men.
Would the great gods bestow these deeper gifts,
These more tumultuous passions, if we were
But larger children ? Are these gifts for nought ?
These passions but to stir our being, and
Disturb the deeps of life with troublous longings
That find no answer ? Must we mock the gods
And our ripe selves with such surmisings ? Raw
We were, and grow to ripe, in spite of all
Our holiest thoughts.

ANTIPAS. How fair thou seem'st !

HERODIAS. And why ?

Answer me that. Is the pink child as fair ?
Are there no meanings in expansiveness ?
Canst thou, large-limb'd, deep-natured, find thyself
Content with the unbudded, passionless
Likes of a boy ? I am full woman, and
If I am fair, my Herod, 'tis for thee.

ANTIPAS. It is most strange that in these pulsing
times,

These brinks of rapture, there should ever be
Some chilling voice that mocks our hopes, some hand
That beckons with its fateful fingers back.
When life's most fullest cup to our lips is held,
And we look in, we see our own eyes fix'd
Upon ourselves, and therein we behold
Abysses deeper than all depth, and still
Deeper abysses. Oh, the madness of it,
The raptures and the pangs of choice !

HERODIAS. I had thought
Thou wast a prince. It has been still my creed
That princes make the right of what they do.
That doctrine fits me deeply. Must we judge
Ourselves like common folk, be sway'd about—
Pull conscience and pull devil? Let me strike ;
I am my only judge.

ANTIPAS. Sweet, thou art brave ;
But evermore 'twixt thee and me will come
One memory, one shadow.

HERODIAS. Shadow ! whose ?

ANTIPAS. Philip's.

HERODIAS. Philip again ! For my part, I
Care not if Philip send us multiplied
Shadows, in endless host, by day and night
So he will keep his large round substance from us.

Cohorts of shadows could not vex me as
His moony face, and soulless smile, and talk
Dryer than winnow'd husks. We never had
One thought in common. On our bridal day
We were divorced in soul ; and every sun
That beats his fiery roadway thro' the skies
Puts vaster chasms 'twixt us. He and I
One,—with a universe between—the gods
Shake with sardonic laugh and chuckling mirth
At the bare thought. To play him false thou fear'st.
How canst thou play him false, who to himself
Grows falser every day? Dost thou do harm
To rob him of a loveless wife? Is that
A loss will fret his soulless soul, or wake
A fraction of a pang? And what of me?
Thou hast great thoughts of him, but what of me?
If thou wouldst play him well, thou play'st me ill.
Can this month be as it had never been?
Hast thou a spell to wipe it out, and keep
A woman from remembering? Must I now
Go back to the old life, and never think
Of this wild moon of heaven? To do may lie
Within our power; to undo, never. Even
The immortal Powers stand palsied 'fore the past.
And I must pace this garden, every nook

And winding walk of which will speak of thee,
 And all these stolen trysts must be forgot,
 And all these surging thoughts must be subdued
 To dull, dead, wifely levels. I must sit,
 A living lie, at board where thou hast sat,
 And whip the thought of thee from out my heart,
 And smile upon my spouse ; must ever be
 That poorest, cramp'dest, pitifulest thing,
 A chaste adult'ress chain'd unto the side
 Of a mummy-hearted lord.

ANTIPAS (*aside*). How like a whelp-robb'd lioness
 she stands !

I am no saint, Heaven knows, but she would storm
 The conscience of a prophet. Queen, thou hast
 Forgot the child.

HERODIAS. Salome ?

ANTIPAS. Ay, Salome.

HERODIAS. Where I go she goes.

ANTIPAS. Thou wilt therefore rob
 Philip of wife and child ? 'Tis a deep drain.

HERODIAS. The child is none of his.

ANTIPAS. Not his ! Then whose ?

HERODIAS. Mine, and mine only. Is there aught
 of him

In my Salome ? Why the child is air,

ANTIPAS. This, past all gainsay,—
The big investment of a father's love.
Not much would Philip grieve at loss of thee,
Thyself hast said. This touches other strings.
Have I not seen the father in his eyes
Follow her slim form with such gaze as was
Blind to all others when that child was near?

ANTIPAS. Ay, a mother
Who steals herself away.

ANTIPAS. I would thou hadst.

HERODIAS. Thou! Why?

ANTIPAS. Why? I will tell thee; and when I have
told

Thyself must make thy choice. It is a thing
Most odd, but never to this hour have I
Remember'd it. But riding once—long years
Have wheel'd around since then—on a summer's eve,
I met a sibyl-visaged woman, some
Dark-tann'd Egyptian, with the strange weird eyes
They have who live 'mid our to-morrows. There
Crouched by the road she sat; but rose, and with
Commanding gesture bade me halt, scann'd face
And hands; spake many things, but chiefly warn'd
Of a Salome whom I should not love,
And yet should love. I laugh'd, as youth will
laugh,

And as thou laugh'st. But why should I remember
That saying, after all this stretch of years,
Just now, in this strange nick and span of time?
Something there is that tells me that the child
One day will lead me to some act will curse
My life for ever. For as the night drew on,
'Twas this night's very fellow,—ominous,
Sultry and thick. What is there in the books
Of Fate that links these two mad nights together?

Hark ! there the thunder rolls, as then it roll'd
Among the gaunt hills. What a blaze was that !

HERODIAS. I have ever lov'd the storm ; I dread
it not.

I am a child of battle. See, the sky
Is glorious in the flame and black of wrath.
Nothing is so magnificent as wrath.
Oh, but to be a god, and speak with a voice
Like that, and shake the living firmament
With such cross-blue bolts.

ANTIPAS. Like the spirit of
The storm she stands, beautiful as the storm.
Come to me, let me look into thy face.
Thou art my dauntless queen, and shalt be mine
For ever. Earth, Hell, Heaven are one with thee.

HERODIAS. Art thou thyself again ?

ANTIPAS. Nay, not myself,
But the old self new fashion'd, multiplied,
Blossom'd, made godlike by the power of love,
Taught me by thee.

HERODIAS. Then the last step is taken.
To-morrow, ere the sun hath quite dried up
The lingering dew, thou and thy retinue
Depart from here ; and when ye have proceeded
Along the dusty highway three hours' march,

Ye halt in some cool spot. There I, the child
One trusty maid and horseman duly come ;
This house, and all the past for ever past,
And a new heaven beyond.
Only one little word more, prince ; thou wilt
Not fail to hold to that which thou hast said
About the other ?

ANTIPAS. Vex not thou thyself
With her. A spell of native air is good
For sickly body and unquiet mind.
Now get thee in. These angry thunderbolts
Perchance will wake some sprawling senseless lout,
And raise the alarm. Brief parting must there be ;
Then a long life of changeless heaven with thee.

(*Exit HERODIAS.*)

So the last step is taken. Let me dream
A long, long dream of't ;—I shall wake at last.
Forbidden fruit ! Let me squeeze, crush with hot,
Passionate, resolute hand the last sweet drop
Of all thy heaven of juice ;—the hell will come.
Rage, all ye thunders, and ye lightnings rive.
Gods, if there be gods, I have caught a glimpse
Into your paradise. I tremble not, but wait
My time, and all the recompense of Fate.

(*Exit. Thunder and Lightning.*)

SCENE III.

The same. Time, early morning.

Enter SALOME, singing.

Flowers, my flowers, come listen to me ;
Ye know I have loved you well ;
Ye taught me the speech of your own countree,
And the tales that the young winds tell.
Heigh ho, pretty flowers, but we've talk'd together
Of loveliest things in the sunniest weather.

Flowers, sweet flowers, come listen to me ;
My heart has been free and wild ;
Ye were older and graver than I could be,
I have never been but a child.
And ye tried in your wisdom to make me wise,
And I only laugh'd in your beautiful eyes.

Flowers, my flowers, it's hey to be young
In the pleasant summer time,
When the air and the heart are full of song,
And all the world is a-chime.
I dream'd there were no songs sweeter than those
That the simple heart of our childhood knows.

But flowers, dear flowers, come listen awhile,
As I whisper soft as a kiss ;
I have told you secrets that made you smile,
But never a one like this ;
And you never must tell it to breeze or bee,
Bonny flowers, for all your old love to me.

For a strange bird yesterday came to my ear,
Sweet flowers, and sang but one word ;
And I could not tell in a whole long year
How my wond'ring heart was stirr'd.
I was only a child at yesterday's morn ;
But the old sweet days will never return.

Just one short word, but it smote me through,
Dear flowers, so strange was the bliss ;
And now I am older by far than you,
So wise am I grown by this.
But I would not go back to those days again,
Nor miss for a moment this new, sweet pain.

Old garden, how I love thee ! Every spot
Lives with sweet memories. Here I sow'd—ah, but
It seems so long ago—beside this wall,
My first flowers ; and I came at earliest blush
Of the next morn, a three-year'd wonderer,

To see the risen bloom, and wept to find
The old brown earth was still brown. There beneath
Yon tree upon the lawn, I caught the bird,
The little palpitating, broken-wing'd
Bird ; and I sooth'd and tended it, and taught it
To love me, and to shake its tiny throat
With twittering song at my approach. There, too,
Lapp'd in the dozing shade, I lay and watch'd
The butterfly that came from somewhere, far
Away, some rainbow land, and wing'd its flight
Uncertain, to sun-tinted flowers, as if
It saw in them some image of the place
From whence it came ; and watch'd the restless bee,
That fill'd the hot air with the hum of its
Incessant sermon to the lazy world,
And most to happy me, who lay and dream'd
The golden noons away. And here I play'd, .
Who had no other playmate, nor had wish
For any other, with my father ; flew,
He chasing, down the springy lawns, behind
The sober bushes, glancing in and out,
And thro' the winding paths, till spent I fell,
A heap of laughter at his feet. He was
A big boy with his little girl. I never
Play'd thus with mother ; she was always stern.

But then how beautiful ! I cannot be,
Let the sweet heavens smile on me as they will,
Beautiful as my mother ; tho', ah me,
How strange it seems !—but yesterday two eyes
Look'd into mine, and someone spoke such words
As went where no words ever went ; and all
The days of childhood pass'd, and lo, the gates
Of life stood open to their widest. Oh,
Yesterday, happy yesterday, thou hadst
How many a golden sister, balmy-breath'd,
With kisses like the sun's, and songs that shamed
The nightingale's, and innocent glad voice ;
But none like to thyself. I lay last night
Sleepless for very rapture, nor could think
For crowding thoughts, and watch'd the great stars
wheel,
Till all the happy night was gone. But hark !
I hear his step ; stay, simple trembling heart,
Thy foolish beatings. Let me pluck some flowers ;
I must not seem to listen.

Enter LUCIUS.

LUCIUS. There she kneels,
An angel 'mong the flowers, like her in the tale
My mother often told me, when a boy,

Sweet Prosperpine in Enna. Little one,—
Why, what a start, and what a blush, and now
A paleness sweeter than the blush. Have I
Frighten'd my pretty bird?

SALOME. Nay, did I blush?
'Tis an old trick of the blood. Thou must not think
It was thy coming taught me that.

LUCIUS. Why, no;
For who can tell what hidden wonders lie
In a girl's heart, and send their ruddy tidings
To her helpless cheeks? But now, my sweet, let be
These fancies. We are come to where the road,
The happy road, breaks into twain. Alas,
Life has no road so rapturous, but there comes
Some bitter fork; and linked hands must part
And linked hearts must ache, while this way one
Goes, and the other that.

SALOME. Dear, so it is,
And sad it is; but sometimes in the course
Of this our life—I feel so wise to-day—
The cruel road, that did so lightly break,
Comes into one again, and parted hands
Meet in a happier linking.

LUCIUS. Little one,
Thou hast the braver heart; so may it be

With us. But now we front the fork ; to-day
In a brief hour or two— how swift the hours,
The mocking hours, dance onward at such times—
My lord and all his train set out, and I
Must go, and thou must tarry.

SALOME.

Ah, but love

Laughs at all distance ; deems it but a reason
For endless happy journeys to and fro,
A dear invisible path that lovers tread
On winged feet, and love sings all the way
Its conquering music.

LUCIUS.

But I shall not see

Thy face, nor hear the better music of
Thy dear voice. Far away the suns will rise,
But not as now with eager face, aglow
With tremulous haste, to see our meeting. Night
Will fall, and all the stars come forth ; but not
As here they love to come, like eyes a-shine
With passionate envy of the sweeter stars
That suns can never quench. The wind will blow
And hurry past me, tarrying not to carry
Enraptured, to some far-off paradise,
Sounds happier than the happy gardens know.
Thy loss will darken all things.

SALOME.

So ; and here

Will still be here, and yet will not be here.
This was the happy garden ; never poet
Saw such, when he had closed his eyes and seen
His highest and his widest visions in
The sightless country. Only memory now
Will shed its soft sad light upon it. I
Shall be where we have been. Ah me, is one
The half of two?—poor wounded, pitiful half,
That bleeds for the other. Yet I shall not be
Here, sweet, but there. We live not where we breathe,
But where we love. So here is there ; for love
Is free of the universe, and cancels time
And space and all things, save its happy self.
We shall be still together, tho' apart,
So love do knit us. Wherefore be thou brave,
And look for happier days.

LUCIUS.

Oh, could I hear

The music of thy comfort when away !
I can half welcome this sharp sundering hour,
So sweet the spell is of thy words ; but there,
Far-off, with but the aching stillness of
My own numb heart, courage will sink, and doubts
Like winds from over fields of ice, will chill
My being.

SALOME.

Doubts ! of me ?

LUCIUS.

No, sweet, for ever

No, nor of me ; but of the endless chances,
The sudden changings—dark from noon, the wine
Bitter as wormwood—all the disarray,
The shocks and griefs innumerable behind
Time's curtain. This I fear ; for who can say
What sombre tints the inevitable years
Will put upon the green leaves of our love ?
Who knows what severance, broader far than these
Sad cleavages of space, the impassive days
Will put betwixt us ? Oh, in all the world
There is no dreader thing than love.

SALOME.

Nor no

Sweeter. Dear, we must trust the years ; 'tis better
Than thus to fear them. Nature's parables
Speak ever of trust ; it is the largest wisdom
Of this our life ;—doth not my gossip tongue
Talk like the learned of the earth ? To those
Who know the calm of trust, the laden days
With happy gifts, tell all their fairest tidings,—
Whispers of sunshine, song of birds, the dreams
Of mellow-hearted vintages—and drop
Their happiest balm. Trust goes into the fields
And reaps, while Doubt sits shuddering in the house,
Fearful of storm, till chill winds sing the dirge

Of the fair dead day. Thou therefore, love, be brave,
Nor scorn the wisdom of a girl's young heart.
Greet every morrow with a smile, and hold
Childlike thy scooping palms, and catch whatever
The bounteous hours let fall.

LUCIUS. Why, what a wise
And sunny little heart it is ! Who put
Such thoughts in this small head ?

SALOME. The birds and flowers ;
No other teachers. But I learnt of them,
And they taught well. I could not hold in these
Two hands the gifts the circling days toss'd down ;
I held my little pinafore, spread out
To widest limits, in my simple trust
Of the glad mornings.

(Trumpet sounds.)

LUCIUS. Ha, the bugle calls.
How shall I hate the trumpet's brazen sound,
Until we meet ! But now adieu. Sweet heart,
Thy wisdom shall be mine. No change for ever
Shalt thou behold in me, nor I in thee.
One long, sweet, bitter kiss ; and then farewell
Till we shall meet.

(They embrace. Exit SALOME.)

Oh, ghostly word farewell !
Oh, days to come, what tidings will ye tell ?

(*Exit.*)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The Dressing-room of Herodias.

Enter HERODIAS and MIRIAM.

HERODIAS. Let down my hair and build it up
again,
Girl, and talk to me ; for I must have speech
And thought of others to drive out my own.
The gloom of these still hours is like the air
Of a vault. Let me have speech and mirth. Sing,
child ;
Canst thou not sing ?

MIRIAM.

No, madam.

HERODIAS.

No ! methinks

I have caught warblings from thee, passing hither
And thither at thy work.

Crooning some sweet song of the shepherd king,
 Alone, when but a simple child, even I
 Have felt the breakings of a chant beyond
 All music, message of a morn from far
 Away, which stars have never seen, the throbbings
 Of a life distinct from life ; and I have past
 Into strange visions, other climes, new meanings,
 Myself rapt from myself, a voyager
 To sunlit havens of the day.

HERODIAS.

All this

From a psalm ! Great Powers, what is the girl ? A
 sibyl,

Haunting the borderlands of being, or
 A poor dazed wretch, brain-dash'd with piety ?

MIRIAM. Only a simple girl, my lady, but
 Such visions hath the great God sent to me
 Simple, thro' simple psalms.

HERODIAS.

And unto me

These same dear psalms have been but deadly
 dirge,

Sour rumblings, melancholy wind that sighs
 In caverns where the dead are laid. No more
 Of them, I charge thee ; speak to me of life ;
 Tell me of something, anything to drive
 Such weird thoughts far away.

D

MIRIAM. No man, my lady ;
But ever since I heard the prophet preach
In Aenon, every thought of earthly love
Pass'd from me, and the heavenly love was left.

HERODIAS. What dialect is this ? The earthly love
Pass'd from thee, and the heavenly love was left !
Is not all love of heaven ?

MIRIAM. Alas, my lady,—

HERODIAS. Speak. Art thou stricken dumb, girl ?
Speak.

MIRIAM. Alas,
I would my lady knew the heavenly love,
Even as it is.

HERODIAS. I know what love is, child ;
None better. Teach the nightingale to sing,
The child to drain the milk, the rose to bloom,
The pulse to beat, the bee to find the flower,
The summer evening to be beautiful,
But teach not me to love. But who is this,
This prophet who hath laid his icy spell
On thy young spirit, turning back its spring
To sunless winter ? Who is he hath made
A loveless crone of such a slip as thou ?

MIRIAM. Nay, but not loveless, madam ; loving
more

And deeper. Only love hath been transform'd,
Purged, freed from taint and weight of earth, and
turn'd

To its native skies.

HERODIAS. Poor wits, where have ye flown?
Purged ! taint of earth ! its native skies ! The moon
Hath touch'd thy crazy brain. But tell me, girl,
Who is this prophet, and what potent charm,
Pill, herb, or other strange medicament
Hath purged thy love, and wean'd thy luckless wits
Clean from thee ? What is this grim prophet's name ?

MIRIAM. John, madam ; and thereto the people
add

The name Baptiser.

HERODIAS. Why ? 'Tis an odd name.

MIRIAM. Because the burden of his preaching is
Repent and be baptised ; and on the banks
Of Jordan multitudes have felt the touch
Of the sweet chrismal waters.

HERODIAS. Then the crowds
Throng round him ?

MIRIAM. Crowds, my lady ? Yes, from far
And near. Rich folks and poor, wise and unlearn'd
I scarcely deem'd there were such numbers in
The whole round earth.

HERODIAS. Thy knowledge of the earth
Is scant, thou seest, being centred now in heaven.
But is this prophet old ?

MIRIAM. No, madam, young.

HERODIAS. Ha ! young. And comely ?

MIRIAM. Nay, my lady, not
As men count comeliness. I have not seen
One like him ; for his face with many a fast
Is thin, and tann'd with many a pitiless sun
Of the desert ; while his thick black unkempt
beard

Brushes his girdle, and his wild hair streams
Adown his shoulders. Strange, too, is his dress,
A simple cloak fashion'd of camel's hair,—

HERODIAS. Why, what a miracle of manly grace !

MIRIAM. Oh, could my lady but behold his eyes,
Blue as the heaven is, and as far away,
And could my lady only hear his voice
Vibrant with utter tenderness and utter
Anger, I think my lady could not but
Long with a nameless eagerness to see
And hear again.

HERODIAS. It may be I shall see
His face some day. Ha ! what was that ? The sun
Seem'd hot ; I had not dream'd of a chill so fierce

And sudden. Sure the eve is nigh or e'er
The afternoon is gone.

MIRIAM (*closing the casement*). The sun is far
From sinking, madam, and I felt no cold.

HERODIAS. Then some ice-breathing spirit must
be sent

To whisper shivering tidings;—my own doom
Or Herod's. He is slain ; they bear him home ;
The curse is fall'n. Why else should such a rush
Of marrow-piercing cold pass thro' me? Chills
So strange are portents, like the numbing stroke
That tells of death at hand. The hard-ey'd Powers
Have many a swift and pitiless messenger
To cross our hopes, and play upon our hearts
Like centre-searching winds on shrinking flowers.
I am calmer now, girl ; tell me somewhat more
About thy prophet of the heavenly eyes
And most terrestrial beard.

MIRIAM.

My lady jests.

HERODIAS. 'Tis but to ease me of my own sad
thoughts.

I would hear more. What doth thy prophet teach ?

MIRIAM. If I could paint the tempest I might
speak ;

But how shall such a simple maid as I

Tell of such sayings ? For, my lady, all
 Who hear him, priests, scribes, warriors, bend
 Before his words as when the multitude
 Bow on the great Day of Atonement. They
 Who hear him know themselves ; so do his words
 Go to the centre of their life, and light
 Old memories with new meanings. Oh, my lady,——

HERODIAS. Well ?

MIRIAM. Oh, my gracious lady, could I speak,
 A trembling girl,——

HERODIAS. Thou canst speak well enough ;
 Who would have thought such tragic deeps lay in
 Our prim, mum serving-maid ? But now a truce.
 Is thy work done ? Hand me the mirror. So.
 Thou hast deft fingers for a prophetess ;
 Some touch, my pretty saint, still dwells in thee
 Of earth. Now fetch me forth the robe the king
 Gave on my birthday ; for he loves it best.
 Me best and it best, oh, superlatives
 Of love, how sweet ye are ! There, little one,
 How looks it ?

MIRIAM.

Beautiful, my lady.

HERODIAS.

Ah,

But in his eyes ? Love's eyes, dream-touch'd, can see
 Far past men's farthest range ; for Nature taught

Love her most hidden secrets. But the hour
Nears of his coming ; oh, the happy word !
Coming to me. Now bid them have the banquet
Ready. He will be weary of the chase,
And hungry ; even love must yield to hunger.
Haste, girl ; we will adjourn thy preaching now ;
Some other day thou shalt disburden all
Thy pure apocalyptic soul.

(*Exit MIRIAM.*)

Heigh ho !

Preaching and preaching ! What is it to love ?
In one brief, sovereign moment love can tell
Tales of far deeper import, open life's
Measureless vistas, touch the hidden springs
Of being. Lawless love they speak of—ah,
But Love makes its own laws, and writes them all
As in the golden ink of Paradise.
And when those fluent laws from the hard code
Of rigid mortals differ most, then love
The sweetest seems. All ill at ease appears
The wilful god in the stiff garb of men.
I love ; and where is he shall fetter my
Free heart, fence in the dancing sunbeams, or
Say No to Passion's great victorious Yea ?

I love and I love ; and unto Love 'tis given,
Unchallenged, to mark out his own best heaven.

Enter SALOME.

SALOME. Mother !

HERODIAS. Ah, child, is it thou ?

SALOME. Oh, mother sweet,

How beautiful thou art ! Is it not grand
To be thus lovely ? Sometimes when I look
Intent upon my mirror, and therein
See the fair mockery of my face, I scarce
For very rapture can forbear to kiss
The phantom mouth that tempts me. But I'd rather,
Beautiful mother, look on thee, than all
The mirrors of the universe.

HERODIAS. Why thou

Sweet slip of flattering vanity, come tell me—
But kiss me first—come tell me why thou find'st
So deep a rapture in this loveliness ?
Have no lips but thine own felt that same drawing
Towards thy sweet mouth ?
Dumb ! Ah, but youth is never mute, but then
Confesses most when silent. There is one—
Let me look in thine eyes—that I have seen—
Ah, one is more than myriads—there is one

With the look in his face that no man ever hid—
Nay but I love him for it—but methinks
He soars full high. Tell me, my pretty one,
What of that one?

SALOME. I learnt to love him, mother,—
It seems so long ago—before we came
Hither, in our old home.

HERODIAS. And now, what now,
My early scholar? Sits the wind there still?

SALOME. Ah, mother, but the wind is very strange.
What now? I sometimes ask myself, what now?

HERODIAS. Love never questions, child, knows
no perhaps
In all its spacious speech; halts never, takes
The plunge that loses self, glad to be lost,
And yet wins all. Love is the uttermost
Extreme of emphasis. If thou hast come
To question, thou didst never love.

SALOME. Alas!
But I have come to question. Yet I was
Fix'd, so I thought, as steadfast as the base
Of this stern hold. Ah, if I did not reach
Unto love's very centre, sure 'twas near
As dreaming unto waking is. He was—
That which he is;—he will not change; and I—

I know not, mother,—I am sad, and then
Not sad ! so deep a change this our new home
Hath wrought in me. But still his voice has power
To shake me as of old ; and then I wish—
Chide me not—

HERODIAS. Think not I chide thee. But, my
pretty bird,
Banish all misery ; make thyself no cage.
Thou'rt in the dew of the morn ; be free as morn.
Thou shalt be lov'd and love ; doubt not of that.
Haste now, and dress thee in thy gayest dress
And sweetest smiles, or e'er thy father comes.

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.

A room in the Castle of Machaerus.

Enter two Soldiers.

FIRST SOLDIER. Dost thou affect women ?

SECOND SOLDIER. Affect ! What signifies affect ?
Speak thy mother tongue ; I know none other. The
long hours between meals here affect my stomach.

FIRST SOLDIER. Affect, man ? Why, lean to
hanker after, long for,—

SECOND SOLDIER. That is the very meaning of them.

FIRST SOLDIER. How so?

SECOND SOLDIER. This way. They that have made us, look you, have put hankerings inside of us. Now what mortal use is there in hankerings, if there be naught to hanker after? 'Tis a sheer waste of making.

FIRST SOLDIER. Well; canst thou not hanker after anything but women?

SECOND SOLDIER. Much, solemnity, much Beef, now, is a thing of gust, and worthy of any man's desire; and wine that washes it down, and composes things into comfort. But these hankerings that are within us don't stand any arguing. If there's one that goes out towards women, thou canst not satisfy it with beef. There's a sort of nature in things. But why dost thou cry out thus against women?

FIRST SOLDIER. Nay, I say nothing but against wives.

SECOND SOLDIER. Well, neither of us is bless'd with that commodity; so we can judge indifferently. Let us hear thy verdict.

FIRST SOLDIER. 'Tis as plain as thy teeth when thou laughest. Wives are like the palsy, that keeps

you for ever on the shake but can't be shaken off. Give me moderation, say I. When a man's satisfied with eating, he stops ; when he's satisfied with marriage, he has to go on. 'Tis a strange economy.

SECOND SOLDIER. Good ; thou hast a pleasant wit. Now for thy foundations.

FIRST SOLDIER. Foundations ?

SECOND SOLDIER. Ay ; grounds, reasons. Thou art half way to a philosopher ; every philosopher has as many reasons as hairs on his chin.

FIRST SOLDIER. Eyes are for seeing, and ears have been known to hear.

SECOND SOLDIER. Oh rare ! Wisdom flows from thee like warblings from a sparrow. Thou shouldst have been a Rabbi. What have thy ears caught ? Expound.

FIRST SOLDIER. Sentries are still ; and when nights are hot, casements are open'd wide.

SECOND SOLDIER. Deeper and deeper. Let us know more.

FIRST SOLDIER. Well, yesternight was such a night. I stood guard beneath my lord's chamber. Such a stillness was in the air, that the hum of a beetle was like a sackbut ; and when a woman is roused, Lord save you, she would make a statue hear.

And my lady was roused. They were in the thick on't when they enter'd the room. Sweet matrimony ! thought I ; what a blessed gift art thou to men ! Billing and cooing come to this !

SECOND SOLDIER. This grows rich. What was the fray ?

FIRST SOLDIER. Why, it seems my lord riding out that day, had met a prophet, with a tongue as rough as my sweet lady's own. This holy man unburdens his prophetic mind to my lord, look you ; speaks of conscience—a quality princes are but scant in—talks, as if he had a dozen heads to spare, of adultery, incest, and other unsavoury matters ; rubs salt into the sore with a vengeance, having names for my gracious lady as would make a mummy start and wince.

SECOND SOLDIER. I would have given the best dinner I ever had to have heard it. What said Herod to him ?

FIRST SOLDIER. Nothing, it seems ; stood stock mute before the fellow from sheer wonder ; while our rash prophet stalks off into the desert.

SECOND SOLDIER. Well, and what said my lady ?

FIRST SOLDIER. Said ? ask'st thou ? Said ! 'Twas a hailstorm, a cataract of the choicest passion. I

could as soon catch the lightning in a bucket as tell thee what she said. God defend me from all wives, say I—particularly from one of my own.

SECOND SOLDIER. Nay, but the gist on't.

FIRST SOLDIER. Gist ! Gist of Beelzebub ! What's the gist of an earthquake ?

SECOND SOLDIER. So. But a part on't, man. Wouldst snatch the whole plate from a hungry man ?

FIRST SOLDIER. If thou hunger'st for it, there is one way in which thou canst have it, plate and dish and all.

SECOND SOLDIER. How ?

FIRST SOLDIER. By the body of Moses, marry a venom-tongued beauty, and thou shalt know. Thou wilt get more bellyfuls than thou hast longing for.

SECOND SOLDIER. But what was the upshot of it ?

FIRST SOLDIER. Vigour. My lord, driven as by a plantation of wasps about his head, sends off before daybreak this morning some dozen mounted men to scour the countryside for our wise prophet. Thou wouldst have heard the din but for thy snorings. Man, it is well for thee that there are no snorings in our last sleep ; else wouldst thou never rise. Thou wouldst outbray the angel's trumpet that we hear of.

(Sound of a trumpet outside.)

SECOND SOLDIER. Lord ! what is that ?

FIRST SOLDIER. Start not ; the angel hath not called for thee yet. 'Tis the horsemen return'd ; and the warder, like the early cock, proclaims his spacious lungs. Come hither to the casement. There they come. Look, yon is our holy man. Heavens, what a face ! Didst thou ever see such a beard ?

SECOND SOLDIER. Faith, no ; 'twould supply a cohort. But I have ever heard that heaven is liberal in beards to prophets. Now he dismounts. Look you, what a dress ! The wilderness hath queer tailors.

FIRST SOLDIER. Thou art blessed with an airy humour. But, man, his eyes ! None but a she-devil could front them. I would not meet them till my conscience were a bit easier. I shall be afraid to dream about wickedness with such eyes in the place.

SECOND SOLDIER. See, now they are taking him to his cell. 'Twill be a queer place for holiness.

FIRST SOLDIER. Ay, in this topsy-turvy world your best men often find themselves in strange lodgings.

SECOND SOLDIER. And your worst ?

FIRST SOLDIER. Hark ye, my friend. It is not for thee and me, who are no prophets, to quarrel with our provender. 'Tis the last thing a sane man will

affront. Eat thy meat, and drink thy wine, and let thy teeth guard thy tongue. But a truce to talk. Dinner is nigh ; and I feel a sinking within. Come, come, let us in.

(Exeunt.)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Herod's Banqueting Hall.

Lords, Captains, Courtiers, &c. feasting.

FIRST LORD. These wines search deep ; they fill
the hidden crannies
Of being with their comfort.

SECOND LORD. Ay ; 'tis pity
But niggard Time should be more prodigal
Of princely birthdays.

THIRD LORD. Thou art passing kind ;
Thou would'st wheel princes into swifter age
To soothe thy belly. 'Tis a precious thing,
Ye princes of the earth, to put your trust

SECOND LORD. The same
Old cynic of the balmy tongue, as sweet
As nipping east wind to the arching back
Of nakedness.

SECOND LORD. Oh, sweetest eloquence !
It gives a zest to Herod's choicest fare ;
Stint not, I pray thee.

THIRD LORD. What ! and add to thy
Gross appetite ? 'Twere bringing sand to the beach,
Or bulging out Behemoth. Eat, sweet friends ;

Eat ; brief is life ; and in the tomb the feasting
Is the other way. Ha ! Folly, is that thou ?

Enter MATTHIAS.

MATTHIAS. My native self ; and yet not so much
a fool, but that I can teach thee a shekel's worth of
wisdom.

THIRD LORD. So ? Let us hear it.

MATTHIAS. Nay, but thy shekel.

THIRD LORD. Mercantile, like the rest. Now for
thy wisdom.

(Throws down the coin.)

MATTHIAS. Meddle not between a man and his
meat. Hungry is soon angry. There is thy money's
worth.

THIRD LORD. Excellent Fool, thou hast mistook
thy trade.

MATTHIAS. Excellent wise man, thou hast some-
what stray'd from thine. It was never consider'd a
mark of wisdom to harangue fools. Therefore are we
all of one colour ; an assembly of scant o' wits, brothers
of the world's most popular fraternity. I would drink
to our health, and steady progress in vacuity. 'Tis the
truest happiness.

SECOND LORD. Drink, and refresh thy mad brain;
thy tongue needs no helping.

MATTHIAS. In sooth, no; 'tis the most independent of members. (*Drinks.*) An excellent drink, brothers, and worthy of the primest flaw-pate here.

Enter HEROD ANTIPAS.

MATTHIAS. Now comes the prince of us all; and the tale is complete.

(All rise, with shouts of "Long live Herod.")

ANTIPAS. My utmost thanks, fair lords and gentlemen.

I pray you now be seated, nor disturb
The flow of the banquet.

(Music. The feast proceeds.)

MATTHIAS. The wine and the music and this most wise company put poetry into me. Now could I, sweet lords,—under the permission of our most sapient prince yonder—blossom, soar, expand, emigrate from myself.

THIRD LORD. Heaven help thee to pass into something saner than thyself. What would'st thou do!

MATTHIAS. Sing, brother. My brain teems; I am rapt; I have visions. Now for a lyre and fit audience!

THIRD LORD. Sir Page, bid Herod know that
Master Fool,
Like the black sultry thundercloud, is charged
With rumbling music, and cannot contain ;
Hath in him lyrics, odes, prophetic gusts,
A dithyrambic tempest. Will his Grace
Let these vast winds of chaos loose to boom
Their lack of meaning on our stricken ears ?
Or must Sir Folly burst ? Sweet Page, enquire.

(PAGE goes.)

Patience, good friend, the messenger is gone.
The earth has room for every kind of fool,
Vocal and dumb ;—'tis a big, hungry world.
See, Herod smiles. Enfranchisement is nigh ;
Thy soul shall sweep into the empyrean,
And thou be laureate of all fools. What saith
The prince ?

PAGE. So please you, 'twill delight him much
To hear the song.

THIRD LORD. Now, nightingale, thy
hour
Is come. Stir thy prophetic deeps, and wail
Thy wildest, wisest strains.

SECOND LORD. Peace, babbler, peace.

MATTHIAS (*sings*) :

Baby laughs in his tiny cot ;
(Time brings laughter at break of day),
Baby weeps for he knows not what
(Time takes all our laughter away)
Baby laughs and baby cries ;
Heedless of all, Time onward flies.

Children play in the noisy street ;
(Time brings bright things every morn)
Children wander with aching feet ;
(Time makes all bright things forlorn)
Childish sorrow and childish play,—
Heedless of both, Time flies away.

Lovers saunter in shady lanes ;
(Time brings fair hopes every noon)
Young hearts struggle with blinding pains ;
(Time strews fair hopes all too soon)
Lovers' rapture, and lovers' ache—
Careless Time will no tarrying make.

Fathers thrill at a prattling sound ;
(Time gives joys when the noon is past)
Mothers bend o'er a grassy mound ;
(Time hath no gift that will last),

Passionate joy, and hopeless woe,—
Heedless Time must onward go.

Old men muse of the days gone by ;
(Time hath still some comfort at eve)
Old men peer and totter and die ;
(Time is a cheat, a make-believe)
Living and dying,—'tis all as one ;
Heedless Time must for ever be gone.

THIRD LORD. Now what a jocund birthday air
is this !

Didst muse it sitting in cold tombs o' nights ?
Look, thy owl song hath made the prince's face
Sad as a grave-cloth ; while our festal friends
Sit as if call'd to their own funeral.
Thou shalt be crown'd chief bard of dismalness
In Sheol's sunless realms.

SECOND LORD. And thou, good sooth,
Thou shalt perform the crowning ; it will sort
With thy grim face and grimmer spirit, wrought
Of some stray spark from black Gehenna's fires.

Enter a PAGE hastily. To HEROD.

PAGE. My Lord, a woman stands without, who
claims

A moment's entrance and one single word.

ANTIPAS. What is her errand ?

PAGE. Nay, my lord, 'tis past

My efforts to discover ; she is mute

As never woman was ; says only this,—

That she must look upon thee face to face,

And utter but one word.

ANTIPAS. What is she like ?

PAGE. Tall, gaunt, my lord ; white-hair'd as
Hermon's top,

With skin deep-brown'd, and glaring eyes like those

Of angry panther ;—such an one, my lord,

As she, tho' grown to whiter years, who brought

The butter in a lordly dish, and drave

The swift nail thro' the heavy hapless head

Of slumbering Sisera.

ANTIPAS. What ! Dost tremble, boy,

At an old woman's eyes ? Thou hast more to fear

From some young girl's. Nay, bid the woman come.

(Exit the PAGE.)

*(Re-enter PAGE, with the SIBYL, who advances and
stands before HEROD.)*

ANTIPAS. A queenly port ! What is thy message
here ?

THE SIBYL. Remember !

ANTIPAS. Remember ! What is it thou wouldst
that I

Remember ? 'Tis a word as wide as all
The buried past. What deed or word that's gone
Shall I call forth from out its charnel house,
And bid it stand before me ? Did I once
Promise thee aught ? A woman's memory
Hath no crack in't to let a promise out.
What wouldst thou have me do ?

Grim statue, speak !
Hast thou come from amidst the voiceless dead,
With those strange eyes that bear the other world
Writ in their unplumb'd deeps,—permitted only
By that far country's powers to speak, of all
Time's rich vocabularies, that one word
To mortal ears ? Whence art thou ?

Silent still ?

Why hast thou come to mar our festal night ?
Let the gods keep their ghostly visitants
And riddling monitors in their own halls,
Where'er they be. Speak, chilling guest, or hence.

(Exit the SIBYL.)

MATTHIAS. Oh, my brothers, this is a rare night of

folly. Now that Madam Wisdom is gone, the air is clearer. Let us by any means get rid of memory. 'Tis a sore let to pleasure.

ANTIPAS. There seems a doom upon our mirth to-night ;

Dirges and shadows,—let there be a truce
To such sweet greetings. Marcus !—Where is he ?

PAGE. Gone, so it please my lord, to usher out
The woman.

ANTIPAS. May the curse alight upon
Her and her memory ! Speak no more of her.
Gentlemen,—

Enter MARCUS.

Ha ! thou comest. Now bring in
The lithe young dancers ; let the minstrels play ;
So eye and ear shall feast, and all be gay.

(Exit MARCUS. *Re-enters after a short space with the*
Dancing Girls.)

MATTHIAS. Sweet sisters, friends ; come to help
us thro' the rudiments. How the world wheels round,
and accommodates things ! Thou, my brother, art a
fool in thy tongue ; thy friends in their bellies ; our
prince in his memory ; and these in their legs. 'Tis

an excellent world. Ah, dance, my lissom sisters ;
dance our poor dwindling wits clean away. Look at
yonder fat lord's eyes. How sweet lust stares thro'
them !

Oh, the Devil he was a skilful man,
And he smoothed the bed with a warming-pan.

Legs beat everything. Time and tune, my sisters,
will win all.

(The dance proceeds.)

ANTIPAS. This way doth comfort come. Marcus,
dost note
That girl on the left? Give me more wine. Her
eyes—
Ye gods, what eyes! And then her speaking limbs !
Here's life, my boy. Another bumper, Marcus,
While she doth pause. Heavens ! what a glorious
wench !
Hark, boy, in your ear.

MATTHIAS. Now are we learning well. The devil
hath many baits and one hook. Heigh-ho, fishes ;
dream not of hooks. 'Tis a merry sport. Art thou
gaping, master? Ha, again !

(The dance begins again.)

ANTIPAS. Once more. One cannot drink one's
fill of this.

Those maddening robes of gossamer ;—the witch !
Where learnt she these rare tricks ? If this is hell,
Why then I want no heaven. Dost think, my boy,
Yond woman wish'd me to remember this ?
I could remember this in lapping flames,
And heed the flames no more than summer air.
Ah, there the music dies. Drink ! give me drink,
Or I must perish.

(Exeunt the Dancers.)

MATTHIAS. So there they go ; and in this way
we commemorate our circling years.

ANTIPAS. Gentlemen all, brave captains of my
hosts,
And you, ye high estates of Galilee,
So fair a night as this, begun so ill,
But going all so merrily, must not end
In such brief mirth. There is one other left,
One highest joy, to light my captains' eyes,
And glad their hearts. This shall out-top all feasts ;
Not Cæsar hath beheld the like of it
In the high palaces of ancient Rome.
Men in all ages shall remember this,

The pitch and apex of all happy times.
Now, good my Marcus, bring the princess in.

(Exit MARCUS. Re-enters with SALOME.)

MATTHIAS. Here we touch the skies. Dim
brothers, to your knees. Here is the very Queen of
folly. Shall there be no homage? Oh world!

*(SALOME performs a long, voluptuous dance, concluding
amidst wild applause.)*

LUCIUS. Has something cozen'd these my eyes
does it lie

In such a space to make so deep a change?

ANTIPAS. This is beyond all dreams, child; thou
hast left

Thy sisters of the craft in the rear, as far
As the clear waves of our Gennesaret
Surpass the bitter, sluggish marsh of Death
Where Jordan's buried. Thou art framed of light,
The Zephyr's sister, nimbler than the wind.
No goddess ever touch'd a raptured flower
With such a foot, nor skimm'd the kissing waves.
Yet thou art warm as flesh. Say, gentlemen
And lords of Galilee, spake I not truth?
Did ever Cæsar feast imperial eyes

On such a picture? Banquets, high delights,
Revellings of kings, the topmost dreams of art
And fancy—all the maddest happiness
Of which the world holds record—this of ours
Outparadises all, and leaves the tongue
Palsied to utter dumbness, that would speak
Its raptures. Say, what wilt thou of reward?
Even to the cutting of my realms in twain
It shall be thine.

SALOME. So please my gracious lord,
'Tis all too princely a reward for my
Poor halting service. But if thou wilt crown
My little efforts in such royal wise,
I pray thee let me ask my mother's aid,
A girl's vague thoughts to inform.

ANTIPAS. Go, child, as wise
And dutiful as graceful. By the gods,
Whatever quest thou carriest back to us
Shall be fulfill'd.

SALOME. I thank my gracious lord.

(Exit SALOME.)

MATTHIAS. By the gods, he said. So hath he
pledged himself to a girl's boundless whims. Brother
fools, let an old journeyman of the craft say a word

in your ears. Women are the worst of all pawn-brokers. They will sell you up to the last rag of your shirt. Heigh-ho! what an advantage it is to be a prince, and play the fool on so capacious a scale! Here she comes—a woman advised by another woman; double woman, look you. Now shall you hear the quintessence of woman. 'Tis a noble hearing. Silence, brothers, while wisdom speaks.

(Re-enter SALOME.)

SALOME. My lord, I pray thee grant me now the
head
Of John the Baptist in a charger.

ANTIPAS. Gods!
What awful wish is this? The Baptist's head!
John's head in a charger! Hath this cursed drink
Stolen my sense? Is that thy very choice?

SALOME. Even so, my lord.

ANTIPAS. And I have sworn, alas!
John's head! I scarce have seen it since the
day

When it spoke words of wrath and doom to me.
God's truth! it was a dauntless head. I thought
Some day to let him forth. For all the people
Deem him a prophet of the highest God;

And oft in solitude the same weird fear
Has haunted me. Is there no other choice ?

SALOME. Or this or nothing.

ANTIPAS. Nay, but think again.
Jewels whose gleam would pale the envious stars,
Thy fair young neck to circle ; costly robes
That never maiden on her bridal eve
Dream'd of ; a coronet for thy bright brow
That queens might sigh for ; fiery Arab barbs
Whose speed would mate the swallow's ; gold
Uncounted ; lands that leave the farthest reach
Of vision fruitless ;—these or aught beside
Of loveliest and happiest, such as dazzles
A girl's eyes, and bewilders with its bliss,
Will I give freely. Is thy choice still firm ?

SALOME. Firm as a prince's oath.

ANTIPAS. Thou hast it there ;
I have sworn ; it must be. These my lords have
heard.

Alas that it must be ! Bear witness, gods,
And ye, my lords, that but for this sad oath
It should not be. 'Tis idle to repine.
Who swears commits him to the iron Fates,
To bend or snap. Haste, Marcus ; for when doom
Comes, then the swifter the more pitiful ;—

Haste, bid the captain of the guard to bring
The princess her sweet guerdon.

(Exit MARCUS.)

Now I see

What the weird woman meant. Remember? Yes,
I shall remember it for ever. Oh,
'Tis sad beyond all sadness how accurst
And cozening memory tarries till a deed
Of hell is done, then whips up in the rear
A hated bride for ever,—by our board,
At bed, in thickest crowds, when most alone,
Divorceless as our skin. Once, long ago,
My lords, this woman met me—now it comes
Back in a flash—spake words I could not fathom,
And toss'd as lightly from me as at close
Of the long day the tired schoolboy flings
His tedious books away ; now in this nick
Of hazard she returns with her one word,
That should have touch'd the quick of thought, but
fell

On my dull sense like tears upon the dead.
Why should the woman wrap such measureless
And awful meanings in one word? God's curse
They are not wont to be so mute, or show

Such nipping parsimony ; they can tear
The very vitals of a language out, and drown
Patience and meaning with o'erwhelming speech.
Ay me, when hell has some rank deed to do,
Men, women, devils, all will league to flout
Their very nature, so as to outwit
The powers of warning.

(HEROD *remains silent.*)

MATTHIAS. Beloved brethren, to what a pass are
we come on this joyous night ! The innermost secret
of a fool is that he never fails to be too late. He
sees nothing but the last flap of old Time's garment
as he whisks round the next corner. 'Tis a merry
chase, but scant o' profit. A fool's songs always end
with alack.

ANTIPAS. Was there none of you,
Sage counsellors of mine, to bid me halt
On the edge of such an oath ? Was no one found,
No Daniel 'midst you all, who could make clear
The mystic woman's meaning ? But one word—
In your own tongue—a simple common word,
That lightly sits upon a child's young lips—
To baffle all the high assembled wits
Of Herod's council table ! Oh, 'tis rare—

A COURTIER. So please my gracious lord, my
lord forgets
He ask'd no counsel.

ANTIPAS. Thou hast wit enough
To interrupt, none further. Who would dream,
Tho' swamp'd and sinking in perplexity,
Of asking counsel at thy vacant face ?
Thou'rt made for bibbing and for sopping, thou.
Keep to thy trade, and pray the kindly gods,
Who love all dulness, it may keep to thee.

(Sees SALOME standing.)

Ha ! there thou standest, waiting thy reward !
Oh, child ! oh, woman ! what fell Fury sat
Unbidden, cloud-envelop'd guest, and hung
Over thy cradle ? When thy little feet
Tried their first trembling steps, who ever dream'd
That they would move to such a tune of hell
As this ? Will it bring comfort to thy heart,
This ghastly recompense ? Wilt bid them frame
The bloody head in silver or in gold,
And hang it in thy chamber, till the hours
The rotting hours do their full maggoty work ?
Oh, girl, who but so brief a space ago
Dandledst thy doll upon thy little lap,

What plaything hast thou won to-night ! Oh, child,
What hast thou done ?

SALOME. My mother bade me ask.

ANTIPAS. Thy mother. Ah, thy mother ! And
thy mother,
Thyself and I shall rue that awful asking
For ever.

(He is silent again for a space.)

Gentlemen of Galilee,
I do forget myself. This is a night
Of feasting. 'Tis my birthnight. Ha ! the word
Hath strangest thoughts wrapp'd in it. I remember—
'That is the word of spell and power to-night,
My lords,—remember. I remember well
What happy pulses throbb'd in the boy's veins
Upon my birthdays. Zadok, thou hast been
My faithful servant long, didst watch my games
When life was morning,—tell me,—Truth should find
Fit lodging in thy old white hairs—come, tell me,
How old am I to-night ?

ZADOK. My gracious Prince,
So many years have told their tales to me,
Such strange beginnings and still stranger ends,
And broken shreds of meanings ; so long years

Have brought so much and filch'd so much away,
That life to my old eyes seems all a maze
Of dancing memories that come and flit,
And will not be remember'd.

ANTIPAS. Oh, 'tis hard
For kings, even from a greybeard, to obtain
Unvarnish'd truth. Come hither, Marcus; thou
Art at life's other end. Dwells sweet truth there?
Come, look into my face; be as a glass.
Is't pucker'd? Go the furrows deep, my boy?
Canst tell the wrinkles with thy sharp young eyes?
Is there no tale of bleaching in this beard?
Speak, boy, and speak what is.

MARCUS. Old Time, my lord,
Seeing it was a noble face, hath dealt
With kind, leal hand therewith, and all his minions,
The years, have left it nobler.

ANTIPAS. Young and old,
Flatterers alike! The mockery of it! Look!
If I were bent with age, a scaly leper,
Mumbling with toothless gums, and slobber'd o'er
With rheum and drivelling tears, ye still would say
It was a noble face.

MATTHIAS. By the prophet Jeremiah, we are
moving towards wisdom.

ANTIPAS. Years, years that come and go,
Go back with me a brief space ; let me be
For one hour what I was. Ah ! what a dream !
What foot has trod that backward journey, and
Stood once more where the child's feet trod, with dew
And dawn about him ; and within, the stir
Of wordless hopes, and wonder, and the strains
Of life's vast music sounding far away ?
But oh, ye crowding yesterdays, ye host
Of many-gifted yesterdays, unprized
And long-forgotten yesterdays, alas !
Had ye no deeper touch of wit to impart
Than such an oath as this ? Ha ! how the gods
Laugh at us ! What a fool is man, even in
The grip of shame !—will curse the hours, the mute
Offenceless hours, the happy-meaning'd hours,
All, save his greatest curse,—himself. Ah me !
Even princes have no flatterers who can speak
Glib lies and subtler than their own weak hearts.

*(Enter the CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD with JOHN'S head
in a charger. He advances with it towards HEROD,
who with a gesture of horror waves him away.)*

MATTHIAS. Sweet friends, here's a vision for
weary eyes. Here's the prime dish of the banquet.

ANTIPAS. Man, wouldst thou madden me? Great
God, what eyes!

Back! Come no nearer! Could'st thou find no cloth
To hide that awful dish? Back, staring fool!
Is the prize mine? Did I crave such a gift?
Would I have crown'd the feast with such a joint?
God's wrath! go give it to the princess; let
Her lovely lady eyes, soft pitiful eyes,
Glut their sweet hallowed hunger on those eyes.
Haste, take the damned thing away.

(CAPTAIN *hands the dish to SALOME, who goes out
with it.*)

MATTHIAS. Gentlemen, this outparadises all.

LUCIUS. Is this my little girl of the garden, this?
Oh, dreams of life, how swift ye die!

COURTIER. My lord,
Shall I call back the minstrels to renew
Their music?

ANTIPAS. Music did he say? Call back?
Couldst thou call speech back to those dumb white
lips,
That would be music. If I could but hear
Tidings of utter scorn and curse from them,
'Twould be as angel's singing. Is it gone,

That head? She is not here. Did she not go?
My own eyes saw her pass thro' yonder door;—
Did she not bear it in her hands? Then why
Are those eyes there, and there, and there? The room
Is peopled with those glassy orbs of death.
How many eyes hath a slain prophet? Speak,
Ye craven men of counsel! Are ye, too,
Mute as that dripping head?

COURTIER Let not my lord
Think of such terrors; they will pass, and sleep;
To-morrow they will be but as a dream.

ANTIPAS. Sleep! Dream! To-morrow! Are
 they words to soothe
The troubled spirit? Shall I ever sleep
So sweet a slumber as will bear my soul
Where this dream comes not? Will a morrow dawn,
So holy, of such sacrificial power,
As will atone for this day, drown it deep
In happy waters of forgetfulness?
Thou could'st have named no dreader word. To
 morrow
Is but a lower circle in the deeps
Of penal horror, but another step
On doom's unending march. Oh, sir, if thou
Couldst kill some far-off morrow utterly,

Bring time and soul and memory and fear
To the black edge of the vast bridgeless gulf
Of nothing, in whose sheer kind deeps all crime
And consequence might make one shuddering plunge
And die for ever,—oh, how many a man,
Even amidst the Furies' hottest chase,
Would bless thy name, and thank the gods for thee
There is no gap in these to-morrows ; end
To consequence is none, nor break.

Good sirs,
Captains, and nobles of my realm, the dark
Follows all light. I had not thought this eve,
This fair and happy eve would come to such
Disastrous close. Put out the lights ; break up
The merry revel. We have supp'd indeed.
Grim guests we have had, for which we did not look
Unsummon'd, eating nought, and drinking nought,
Yet marring all ; speechless, yet will their voice
Break in on every noisy scene of mirth
And every hour of silence, till the lamps
Of life go out in the unending dark.
Will they be dumb then ? But why linger here ?
Now let me from this hateful room of death,
Ere its breath choke me. Night is well-nigh gone ;
The morrow's near—ah me !—let us seek rest,

If rest will come, and whatsoever dreams
Sweet, awful, pitying, pitiless sleep will give.

(Exit ANTIPAS.)

MATTHIAS. Oh, my brothers, this is the pitch and
apex of all happy times.

(The feast breaks up ; they all go out.)

SCENE II.

The grounds of the Castle of Machaerus.

Enter LUCIUS.

LUCIUS. A little span of days, and such a change!
'Tis not in circling ages to do more
Than kill our love. That changes all. Oh, love,
In life so lovely, how dost thou become
The ghastliest of all dead things! All besides
Death hallows, tho' its touch be awful, and
Puts a new, weird, brief beauty into it.
But when love dies, it is as if death slew
An angel, and corruption seiz'd the heaven
Of the grand visage, turning it to worse

Than ruin, while the shuddering seraphs look
On an immortal corpse. Love is our all
Of heaven, and love brought heaven to me, and fill'd
All life's fair avenues and spacious prospects
With its own meanings, whisp'ring its great name
To every drop of blood, that danced as mad
With joy to hear it. Oh, how sweet she seem'd
In that old garden of her father ! scarce
Would pluck a flower for me, lest peradventure,
So ran her simple childish creed, the flower
Should suffer. And now yesternight,—oh God,
That awful night ! Let me not think on't, or
Reason will die as love died. Oh, soft hands,
So often link'd in mine ! Oh, girlish eyes,
Where the new pride of love could never conquer
Or dim the pity ! Oh, young heart, the home
Of fancies tender as a baby's touch !
Oh, love ; oh, life ; oh, death ! See, there she comes
Like, ah, how like !—there is the horror of it—
But never more the same. Mine yesterday,
Alas, by all the bonds of passionate, first,
Last love ;—no more for ever.

Enter SALOME.

SALOME.

Lucius !

LUCIUS (*aside*). Ah, the old voice ; how it can
shake me still !

Fair Princess, I am come as thou didst wish.

SALOME. Fair Princess ! at my wish ! Didst thou
not wish ?

Princess ! 'tis a new name ; it used to be

Salome. Are we grown so statesmanlike

That courtly titles sweeter sound than love's

Old names ?

LUCIUS. No names can ever sound as did
Those happy names.

SALOME. Did ! Are they then of the
past ?

Is the dream broken ? Thou art cold and far ;

Tho' near to the point of touch. Thou hast no
greeting

To-day, like the old greetings. Must I ask,

Hot-cheek'd, for the dear kiss that used to come

Exultant, as the music leaps abroad

Instinctive, at the touch of hand and strings ?

No word ? What is it, Lucius ? What hath come

'Twixt us since yesterday ?

LUCIUS. Oh ! name it not.

Speak not of that ; it is a word of doom.

Music, thou said'st ;—I think that nevermore

I shall hear music but my heart will ache
Bitterly, nigh to death. Oh, little one—
If't be the very last time that I use
The dear sweet name—oh, what a weary way,
How many a milestone on despair's sad road,
What years my aimless feet have wander'd since
Last the sun dipp'd behind the dusky rim
Of the far west !

SALOME. Why, what hath driv'n thy feet
On such a journey ? Hast thou travell'd this
Vast sombre pilgrimage in dreams ? How else
Could years be compass'd so ?

LUCIUS. If 'twere a dream,
And any mortal or immortal power
Could wake me from it, how my heart would leap,
Lighter than does the mother's when she looks,
Rapt from the very clutch of death, upon
Her first-born baby's face ! But 'tis no dream.

SALOME. Then what ? Thou spak'st but now of
music, saying
That evermore the sound of't will create
Bitterest heart-ache. Did it wound thee, then,
That I should dance before my father's guests
Upon his birth-day ? Is't so deep a crime
To feel the morning in the blood, and let

The rhythmic rush of being move the girl's
Young limbs? Is it so dread a thing to obey
A mother's bidding?

LUCIUS. Nay, thou know'st full well
I am no saintly bigot. I could watch
The happy dancing of thy feet from morn
Till starry night. But such a dance,—and after
Those others, those paid, painted bits of mere
Animalism,—and 'fore that audience, those
Gross-working mouths and lustful eyes,—and thou
A royal princess! What a stoop was that
For the Salome of old days!

SALOME. What right hast thou——?

LUCIUS. Nay bear with me a moment, but a
moment.

Thy father's guests, thou said'st. Hast thou forgot
That other, all so soon?—the games of which
So often thou hast told me. Lives he not?
Can such a little space wipe out long years?
Has he forgotten, there,—alone? Oh, child,
That thou hadst never come! We had been parted,
But not as now.

SALOME. My mother brought me. What
Could I against her will? Do I regret?
I know not. I am here; and it is wisest

To keep our thoughts where we are. Yet sometimes,
Lucius,—for I will tell thee, spite of all
Thy preaching,—but sometimes my thoughts go back
To the old days ; and in my ears I seem
To catch my father's voice, and if I shut
My eyes I see it all again, and half
Long for the simpler pleasures of those times.
And then this fuller life comes home to me,
And whispers such deep meanings, that to-day
Seems infinitely wonderful, and all
Those childish memories are to me no more
Than the sun-tinted bubble to the boy,
When it hath burst.

LUCIUS. And thus thou canst wipe out
Home, father, childhood, all, with a breath, and lo !
They are not, never were. To-day is all !
Nay, then, I marvel not.

SALOME. Marvel at what ?
Thou art a riddling preacher. Say thy say.

LUCIUS. How can I say it ? Who would not be
 dumb
On such a text ? 'Tis horrible beyond
All horror. If the dance brought shame to the eyes,
What of the payment ? If the deed were night,
What language of eclipse and death that's spoken

In the mid gloom of all the Stygian land,
Could tell the deed's reward? Oh, child,——

SALOME.

Enough.

Child me no more. I came not here to listen
To Stygian croakings. I have borne thus much
For the old love. Not now to justify
My doings care I; but if ever man,
Tho' holy as the heaven, should utter words,
Barb'd with hell's venom, 'gainst thy mother, then
Perchance thou wilt remember me. There is
No more to say.

LUCIUS.

There never will be need

Of any happy or unhappy thing
To bring thee to remembrance. 'Twas a dream
Fairer than heaven. I cannot dream it more,
Bring the years what they may. 'Tis gone; and I
Am but as a tinted bubble when it bursts.
There is no more to say, but fare thee well
For ever.

(*Exit* LUCIUS.)

SALOME. So that is ended. He is gone. He was
A pretty boy, and lov'd me passing well
And tenderly; and I lov'd passing well
And tenderly. A pretty tale it was,

Boyhood and girlhood walking hand in hand
Beneath the roses ;—and he lov'd me well.
Oh, mother, I have given him up for thee ;
And he was true as life, and lov'd me better
Than I shall ever be belov'd again.
There is scant use in grieving ; but it was
A pretty tale, and I may grieve at least
A little moment. I shall miss his face
Awhile, when I come hither, and his speech,
Gracious and sweet, the language of his heart.
Hey me ! but how my foolish eyes grow moist !
And yet I think even mother would allow
The wetting of one kerchief for the loss
Of a first lover. Ha ! First ! 'Tis a word
Of moment and of compass, and hath balm,
Beyond the scope of pharmacies, to heal
The young heart of its griefs. I have heard say
That first is always dearest. But if first
Be gone,—why then another. No deep sage
Could put it wiser. For the world is wide
Exceedingly, and there are handsome boys
And gallant men in't, who would proudly give
The last drop of their blood for but one kiss
From these rich, fickle lips. Heigh-ho, if I had
A strain of music, I could dance a long

MIRIAM. Frenzied ! But thy speech
So straight and vivid is that one would think
Thyself hadst 'scaped the dull and sleepy bounds
Of sanity. Thou lik'st not this my grasp ?
'Tis not so sweet as his I met but now ?
A handsome bit of a boy ; and yet methought
A trifle moody for a happy lover.
Ah, pity 'tis that life so fitful is.
Come, calm thyself, dear lady ; 'tis not deem'd
A lady's part to struggle. There is something
In these thin fingers past thy baby strength.
I am mad, thou said'st. 'Tis true ; and yesterday
I was as sane as silence ; pent and cramp'd
Then with poor phantom fears ; now free as storm.
And thou shalt hear a free brain's stormy speech
A moment. My sweet lady, thou hast danced—
Oh rare—the bravest tongue in all the world
Into the dusty stillness. And I saw—
Hear'st thou ?—I saw—this morn, with mine own
 eyes—
Nay, strive not ; thou art nipp'd as close as death,
And thou shalt listen—with these very eyes,
Now looking into thine, I saw upon
Thy mother's table,—oh, the blessed sight—
The prophet's head, true fearless head, and the tongue

Spear'd with a silver skewer. And the vision,
Supple-limb'd lady, it hath rapt me far
From my old self, into a fiery mood,
Where prophecies and fierce anathemas
And hates and madnesses and thoughts of doom
Jostle and rage and strive. Hold ! Not a word !
How shall poor sanity with madness fight ?
Thou hast a pretty face, a soft pink face ;
Let me look into't ;—ah, a pretty face,
Fit face for luring fools—scared somewhat now,
And piteous. Face, may the consuming thought
Of that dead face eat into thee, with slow
And leprous deathliness ! Wide eyes, as blue
As heaven is, may your heaven die out in thick,
Groping eclipse ! May every kiss that falls
On those red lips blister and scorch them like
Hell's hottest cinders ! And for those round limbs,
Voluptuous limbs, insinuating limbs,
That spake so fell a message, they shall be
The sport of palsies, and the dancing-ground
Of agues and all quivering sicknesses,
Cruel as thou art. But thy soul—thy soul ?
Thou hast no soul ; poor creature, thou art but
Flesh, miserable flesh ; no curse of mine
Can touch thee elsewhere. Only one thought

Of pity moves me for thee,—in that thou,
Wretch as thou art, thou art the child of one
Baser than thou. Now get thee hence to her.
Let evil comfort evil as it may.
For me,—the heavens are kind ; I shall not see
Thy face again, nor hers.

(Exit SALOME, hurriedly.)

Oh, God of him,
Thy prophet, keep my breaking heart, and guide
My footsteps thro' this bitter weary world.

(Exit MIRIAM.)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The boudoir of Herodias.

Enter HERODIAS, and LYDIA, her maid.

HERODIAS. Girl, has no tidings of thy master
come?

LYDIA. None, my lady.

HERODIAS. Which flies the faster, good or evil
news?

LYDIA. I know not, my lady.

HERODIAS. Go yet again, and bid the watchman
look

Along the road, if he may spy the approach
Of any crawling horseman, bringing home
News of thy lord.

(*Exit LYDIA.*)

I could bear crushing grief,
But not this blank suspense. My lord's away,
Fighting the discrown'd woman's angry sire.
Days come and go, and yet no tidings come.
I am sick with time and fear. Is there no sound
To break the deathly silence of this place?
Let me have battle with its rude alarms,
And sights of blood, and rout, rather than this
Fear-breeding stillness! Gods, why did ye make
A woman of me? 'Tis a woman's work
To watch and wait and ache and fear and weep.
These trembling drudgeries are not for me.
Unmake me, sear my beauty, seam, entrench,
And grizzle with your rudest hands my face,
But let me act and move and strike and die.

May the curse take this leaden-footed girl !
Why tarries she ? Do all conspire together
Against me ?

(Re-enter LYDIA.)

Speak. Can anything be seen ?

LYDIA. Nothing, madam, not even a cloud of
dust, as far as the eye can roam. But the road
winds over the brow of the hill, my lady, and they
may be nearer than we think.

HERODIAS. Well, then, let us talk. Come nearer
to me, girl ; seat thyself there. Thou art no saint,
like the crazed creature that is gone ?

LYDIA. Truth, no, my lady ; it is a calling to
which I have no leanings. I have mostly observed
that saints are either miserable or mad.

HERODIAS. There I am with thee, girl.

LYDIA. I knew it, my lady.

HERODIAS. There is a spice of devil in thy tongue ;
but I like thee for it. How did'st thou know ?

LYDIA. Madam, we are not blind.

HERODIAS. We ! Then thou and thy fellows
discuss me ?

LYDIA. Madam, we are not dumb.

HERODIAS. No, I warrant. Silence hath but a

poor time of it in a colony of girls. So ye pass me under review, undress me, dress me again, and note all? 'Tis the way of the world. The gust of life is in scanning. There is enough judging done every day for a judgment day.

LYDIA. My lady is not angry?

HERODIAS. Nay, child; I am not so foolish. It is the nature of things. I am mistress of your time, but not of your thoughts. Thought is not to be hired, even in a palace. I would not stint your merriment. Your tongues may wag like grasshoppers', but they shall not trouble me. But tell me—thou hast said, remember—I challenge not thy thoughts, but thy speech—how dost thou know my thinkings in this matter?

LYDIA. Partly, my lady, from the melancholy scatter-brain, Miriam.

HERODIAS. Ah, I remember. She tried her psalms and her preachings upon me. 'Twas a glum, unappreciative audience. What hath she said to thee?

LYDIA. In faith, my lady, I——

HERODIAS. Nay, shyness sits not well on thee. Of what hath the chalk-visaged prophetess discoursed? Speak, flippant. Let me have a touch of honesty. Ceremony makes one long for it.

LYDIA. I may talk freely, my lady?

HERODIAS. Ay, let thy tongue be as free as thy eyes, that seem so demure and modest. Think that thou hast a soldier of the guard before thee. Thou knowest how to address such?

LYDIA. Yes, my lady; 'tis a bit of schooling that one learns without a teacher. They fear a glib tongue, my lady, but they like it.

HERODIAS. Thou art for numbers, then?

LYDIA. There is risk in it, madam; but in the long run it is the best economy. There is no more necessary art in love, my lady, than that of giving up. 'Tis a singular creature, my lady, a man'; big and bluff, but born to be ruled.

HERODIAS. Teacher or not, thou hast learnt well.

LYDIA. A merry lesson, my lady.

HERODIAS. So. But now what said our mad virginity?

LYDIA. Much, madam. Spoke at large on the prophet of the rich-cropp'd chin, and his icy doctrines; glanced off, in her abrupt way, to the Princess Salome and her dancing—set down her caperings, as she call'd them, to your ladyship. And a great wisdom in my lady, said I; I would I had the princess's

nimbleness of limb. Toss-skirts, lewd-limbs, devil-toes,—such was her sweet eloquence. 'Twas rare sport for us, my lady. Then she turn'd to my lord and your ladyship, and spoke of some old commandments. Lord, said I, what have they to do with commandments? Finally, when the vinegar-blooded prophet was silenced, the last barriers of reason collapsed, and with wild cries about judgment and the pit of hell, she took her saintly self off, and our sport was ended.

HERODIAS. Ha! And if I had known what a poison-bag lay beneath her pious tongue, some rough and ready leech should have lanced it effectually. Now for thy other partly.

LYDIA. Mine own eyes, my lady.

HERODIAS. Well, and what have they seen?

LYDIA. The loveliness of my lady and the nobleness of my lord. And I marvell'd not, my lady, that ye both could break down the dull world's restraints.

HERODIAS. Thou hast a free tongue, indeed. So thou deem'st my lord noble?

LYDIA. Madam, the most heroic, the courtliest, the most gracious,—

HERODIAS. Stay. A woman brooks not too many superlatives for her lord from another woman. Tho

art a mighty forward chit, and not troubled with scruples. Has he cast eyes on thee ?

LYDIA. Oh, my lady, I have never ventured to look beyond a captain of the guard.

HERODIAS. Well, see to it that thy meek eyes soar no higher. Heads are not over safe here, as thou knowest. Heigh-ho ! we talk and we talk, but I would that he were back again. 'Tis a weary waiting.

LYDIA. It will all turn out well, my lady.

HERODIAS. Ah, thou hast a light tongue ; but love's heart is heavy. Sing, girl.

LYDIA (*sings*) :

She stood by the gate,
Her heart was sore ;
" I wait and I wait,
He comes no more."
But the night wind spake
Mid the chill and dew :
" The morn will break,
With eyes of blue."

She stood by the gate,
As the morning came,
With its heart elate,
And its cheeks of flame.

And her heart was bright
As the heaven above,
For the morning light
Brought back her love.

HERODIAS. A poor village song of a milkmaid
who hath quarrell'd with her ploughboy. What know
they of war and its alarms?

(Sound of a trumpet.)

Ha! there's a sound that's worth a universe
Of rustic songs. Haste once again to see
If news be come.

(Exit LYDIA.)

These passionate hearts of ours
Beat to most differing music. When the heavens
Bar us from tidings, how we pant to burst,
Caged in with maddening voicelessness, the doors
Of stillness, hungry, quivering for news.
But should the powers, relenting, send to us
Some voice with tidings, then we shrink, and long
For the old cramping silence, lest the voice
Be crueller than muteness. Even so
It is with me. I have pined for days to hear
What now I dread to hear.

(Re-enter LYDIA with a WARDER.)

HERODIAS. Speak, sir ; thy news.

WARDER. Madam, our troops are near.

HERODIAS. Hath no one come
With tidings ?

WARDER. Yes, my lady, one hath come,
A swift-horsed courier from our lord, with hot,
Foam-spatter'd steed,——

HERODIAS. Yes, yes, thou rambling fool.
What news ? What news ?

WARDER. My lord is hastening on.

HERODIAS. Said he not how the day went ?

WARDER. Truth to tell,
So strange he seem'd and spent, I scarce could know,
My lady,—so his words were jumbled—what
Tidings he brought.

HERODIAS. Then we have lost. 'Tis plain
As the terror on thy face. Out, trembling loon !
And thou, pink piece of pertness, get thee gone ;
Or I shall slay ye both.

(Exeunt WARDER and LYDIA, hurriedly.)

Lost ! Let me be
Alone. Lost ! And yet he returns. “My lord
Is hastening on,” the stammering fellow said.
I thought he would have won or died. He never

Loses, who dies ; the loss is in the living.
In that way every bravest man may win.
So *she* hath her revenge, and I my doom.
Philip will hear it, too ; and I can see
Upon his face the large, fat, sickly smile.
The people will not fail to moralise,
In their oracular way, and talk of Fate
Pursuing wrong. Fate—so their pious speech
Will run—Fate giveth years and years of start,
But catcheth at the last. Our very slaves
Will hint, and nudge, and smirk behind our back
And he is hastening on to all of this !
Were I as meek and fond as some wives are,
I should run forth to meet him, beaten thus,
And throw my arms about his neck, and bless
The immortal gods that he hath safe return'd.
I was not fashioned so ; I never drew
Such milk into my being. The kind gods
May bend their ears long, long enough or e'er
They catch such thanks from me. My doom is this
That I can love no longer. Yet the whole
Of life to me was love ; for that I gave
Peace, fame, truth, home,—all that a wife holds dear
Gave gladly, even with rapture, finding love
Full balance for them all. And now the end

Is this,—that they are gone, and love is gone.
So all is gone ; and nought is left but gap
And memory.

Grim leavings ; but the heroic heart is seen
In what it bears more than in what it does.
I neither curse nor bless the gods. To bear
Always remains, when everything is lost.
Nor conquering men nor careless gods can take
That gift away. I have drunk deep of joy ;
Thirst now shall be my bliss. Pleasure divorced,
Let me wed Grief, and from that nuptial bed
Bear Ache and Pang and Shame and Loss and Gloom ;
Ill-favour'd children, but less sorrowful
Than their sad mother. Nay, but I begin
Weakly to play the woman, and lament
Over myself. What is there to lament
When to myself I'm left ? Am I not all
I need ? The woman now shall die in me ;—
All save the woman's pride and will to endure.
Fates, gods, whate'er ye are, I challenge you
Even to the death. Henceforward you and I
Know nothing more of truce.

(Sound of marching and horses below.)

Enter ANTIPAS.

ANTIPAS. Queen, thou hast heard
The tidings ?

HERODIAS. I have heard.

ANTIPAS. No more to say,
After these weeks of absence and of peril ?

HERODIAS. What would'st thou have me say.
 'Tis *her's* to speak.

Conquest is eloquent, defeat is dumb.

ANTIPAS. Defeat ! Ay, so we call it ; but defeat
Need not be shame.

HERODIAS. My thoughts run otherwise.

ANTIPAS. Who judge unknowing always hardly
 judge.

Who know the grim mischances of the fray,
The sudden perils, unforeseen alarms,
Panics that shake thick ranks, and all the wild
And swirling madness of the battle, know
Full well the greater madness that can judge
Lightly, far-off, of such an issue. What
Man could do, that I did ;—I would not stoop
To such weak pleadings save to thee. Nor skill,
Nor courage, nor aught else avails against
The iron-fronted Fates.

HERODIAS. I had not thought to hear from thee
 such poor,

Unprincipely advocacy. All thou didst
That man could do,—save one thing.

ANTIPAS. What was that ?

HERODIAS. Most noble question from a soldier's
lips !

What was it ? Why, to fall unconquer'd, and
To die with glazed eyes fix'd upon the foe.
That had been vict'ry.

ANTIPAS. What a welcome home !
One thing, it seems, slipp'd from my memory ;
One thing thou hast forgotten.

HERODIAS. Well ?

ANTIPAS. Just this :—
That all this sweat and strain and dust of war,
These marchings over sands as white as death
And hot as hell, the hack'd limbs, and the drain
Of blood and strength,—all this was done and borne
For thee, for thy fair name, to keep thy head
From the wild rush of vengeance. 'Tis a big
Forgetting. But no more. I cannot speak
Further. How dark it grows !

(He staggers to a couch.)

HERODIAS *(rushing to the door)*. Help there, haste,
help !
My lord is dying.

Enter LYDIA *and a* CAPTAIN.

Run, girl, bring the leech

Upon the instant.

(Exit LYDIA.)

God ! how white he is !

Is this death, Captain ? Help me loose his helm ;

I had not thought my hands could tremble so.

Poor lips ! speak once again ; oh, be not mute

For ever. Let me catch one little word,

One sweet word of forgiveness ! Is there pulse,

Captain, in these pale hands ? None. All is past.

Those avenues of sound are now closed up

In the unbroken silence.

CAPTAIN. Nay, let my lady calm herself ; the
pulse

Still beats, tho' faintly.

HERODIAS. Then he lives ; he shall
Not die. Ye cruel powers, be pitiful

To him, not me, who never dream'd to pray,

And would not, save for him. We can no more ;

We must abide the coming of the leech.

But, Captain, thou wast with him ; know'st thou aught
Of this strange deathliness ?

CAPTAIN. I half suspect
The cause, my lady. I was nearest to him

Throughout the battle, following close behind.
Where thickest peril was, he was. He seem'd
The genius of the battle ; and his helm,
Amid the beating billows of the fight,
Guided us onwards ; till, when victory show'd
Within our grasp, some ill-forged javelin found
Sad passage thro' his harness, summoning
The ruddy secret of his life. He fell ;
And with the vast hell-throated shout of war
The foe swept on him. For a moment we
Waver'd ; and then with thrice as dread a shout,
Broke, madden'd, on their closing ranks, and
seiz'd

The deathlike form, and bore him far away.
There I, with my rude surgery, essay'd
To stem life's ebbing tide ; and when the sun
Sank, the cool, healing air of eve brought back
Faint colour to the cheeks ; and with what draughts
Of water we could find, we laved his face,
And bathed the parched passage of his throat.
Then on the morrow he would ride ; and home,
Defeated but not shamed, slow-pacing, we
Return'd. Perchance the jolting horse hath loosed
The clumsy staunchings, and let flow again
The trickling stream of strength.

HERODIAS. Oh, Captain, thou
Hast brought my own life back. For I had dream'd—
Even thrown it in his face in my rash heat—
Of coward yielding and swift-footed flight,
At peril's first approach. I cannot say
My thanks ; but thou shalt know. Now for the leech.
Why stays he ? Fever'd expectation finds
Time's chariot like a heavy, lumbering wain,
Deep-rutt'd. Ha ! he comes.

Enter the DOCTOR and LYDIA.

Good, doctor hear :
If thou canst ransom him from death's fell hands,
Name but thy fee, and it is thine, even if
My diadem be pawn'd for't.

DOCTOR. Whatsoe'er
Of skill I have, madam, is thine. Meanwhile
All must be quiet. It were well for thee
To leave us now. Good Captain, lead her forth.

(*Exeunt* HERODIAS *and the* CAPTAIN.)

For thee, smart bit of frippery, there is scant
Ministry in thy face. Go thou and bring
Some sober piece of soothing womanhood.

(Exit LYDIA.)

So now, old Death, one struggle more with thee.

SCENE II.

Herod's Council Chamber.

Enter HEROD, HERODIAS, COUNSELLORS, OFFICERS
OF STATE, &c.

ANTIPAS. 'Tis a strange tale.

HERODIAS. Ay ; hatched by some old wife,
That knows to wind her charm'd way to the heart
Of fools.

FIRST COUNSELLOR. Nay but, my gracious lady,
all

The city was astir with't. Mine own eyes
Beheld the tumult ; for where'er we pass'd
Were knots of men, or less or greater, who
Spake with aw'd face and bated breath of this
Alone. The merchantman forgot his wares ;
The buyer ceased his wiles ; the gasping fish
Slipp'd back into the sea while the fisher stood
Rapt with the news ; the publican awhile
Forbore to cheat ; the very children stay'd
Their noisy games, and gather'd in dumb heaps
Of wonder. 'Twas as if the news had come

Of some dread battle, where their fathers, sons,
Sweethearts and brothers lay with stark, glazed
eyes

On the drench'd sward, tho' in the raptured hour
Of victory ; so all men's hearts were moved.

ANTIPAS. Didst thou behold the prophet ?

FIRST COUNSELLOR. No, my lord,
For twice the sun had risen, and twice had sunk,
Since the great deed was done ; and yet the folk
Spake of naught else.

SECOND COUNSELLOR. But I, my lord, I saw.
For, so it chanced, the father of the child
Was an old playmate of my boyish days ;
And when he fled, tear-blinded, from the house—
The child's life flickering to its latest beat—
And stagger'd thro' the gaping press, to bring
His last despairing hope, the prophet, if
Perchance his skill might turn life's dial back,
Myself was present,—

ANTIPAS. And thou saw'st his face ?

SECOND COUNSELLOR. Even so, my lord, for I
was nigh.

ANTIPAS. Then tell me,
What sort of face was't ? Was it like—I saw
Thee there that night—thou mind'st it well ;

Thy look speaks that—yet not as I do—say,
Was't like that other face?

HERODIAS. Peace, peace, my lord ;
Mar not with childish questions this sweet tale.
'Tis worthy wisest ears. Good sir, proceed.

SECOND COUNSELLOR. The truth is sober, madam,
nor is changed
By lightness or by doubting. To our eyes
We give full credence.

HERODIAS. Ay, but oftentimes
We see but what we will see. Fantasy
Can cast its spell o'er eye and ear, and make
Things visible and voices thunderous,
That have no being. Who can tell if sense
Be not sometimes a phantom light to lead
Far off from truth?—a wilderness mirage,
Dream coronation of the sandy waste,
A picture of our longings? We deceive
None like ourselves. For Will hath bribes to lure
Sight, hearing, touch, and taste, and smell, the five
Passionless warders at the gates of being,
To its own ends ; and in a trice, by a call
Of magic, lo, the incorruptible
Pocket corruption ; and thenceforward, sense
And dream commingling, hard is yielding, shade

Counterfeits light, death takes the very hues
Of life, and in the frantic whirl of things
We clutch the gleaming falsehood for the truth
Till reason swoons.

SECOND COUNSELLOR. It may be so, my lady.
I cannot make such journeys; I but tell
That which plain eyes have seen in the light of day,
And simple ears have heard.

HERODIAS. Say on; we wait
Thy tale with wonder.

SECOND COUNSELLOR. Wonder! oh, my lady,
It makes all wonder common. I am one,
As they who know me best know well, not wont
To let astonishment stare forth from round
Child's eyes, or admiration lightly move
The slow-paced tongue. I have look'd on strangest
sights,

In many wanderings 'mid the tribes of men,
And lock'd them in the silent house of thought.
This passes marvel. For I saw the child,
The child whose eyes had often search'd my own
With eager questionings, I saw her lie,
Dumb after all her piteous moanings, still
After the tossing agony of life's
Last fight, chill'd in the ghastly loveliness

Of waxen death. I stood beside her couch—
Oh, sirs, so near and yet so far away.
What voice had I, what voice had any man,
Multiplied even with earthquake powers, to cross
That universe of distance? What could love
Love only not omnipotent, in face
Of this? Even thus I saw her lie, and all
Who stood around her saw her thus ; and then—
My tongue but gives the tidings of my eyes,
Make of it what ye will—when he had come
And gone, I saw the dead face warm with health,
The infinite road recross'd, and sweet life speak
Its happy messages in every limb.

HERODIAS. In sooth, a tale of wonder. Thou,
good sir,
Hast told it passing well. But hast thou not,
Thou, many-travell'd, hast thou never heard,
Sage, silence-loving wanderer, of men
Who lie in such a marble trance,—the pulse
And every vanquish'd sense so far retired
In unknown caverns of our life—so deep
A counterfeit of death as mocks the skill
Of the most practised vision, and would half
Puzzle the ghoulish and unblinking eyes
Of Death himself, were he bent thitherward?

Hast thou not heard of that? 'Tis not infrequent,
According to my reading.

SECOND COUNSELLOR. More than once
Such sight hath met my eyes, my lady.

HERODIAS. Well,
The answer to the riddle.

SECOND COUNSELLOR. It is not
In me to pass, my lady, thro' the dim
Side wicket-gates of life, exploring these
Forbidden caverns.

HERODIAS. Ha, thou fearest then?
Is not all knowledge worth the quest,—the more
If it can break life's age-long barriers down,
And pass into the pathless? I would grasp
Power by whatever means. There is no secret
So reverend, that I would not lay my hand,
My palpitating but arresting hand,
If chance so favour'd me, and bid it tell
Its inward meaning.

SECOND COUNSELLOR. Ah, my lady, but
The pathless leadeth whither? He who plants
His rash feet in that awful country, finds
After a moment's dizzy rapture, swift,
Unplumb'd descents to ever deeper dark,
Farther from every meaning, every power,

Rapt even from thought, in sickening eddies whirl'd,
And waiting on what seems the shore is death.

HERODIAS. Ha, and the beaten paths, wise,
travell'd sir,

The broad, firm roads, tramp'd solid by the feet
Of vast no-thinking generations—these
So safe, with such a light upon them, far
From giddy raptures, mountain heights, sweet sir,
These dusty levels of monotony,
With all their fingerposts to guide the poor,
Crass heads of men,—what waits there at the end
Of these but that same Death? And who of all
Those safely-voyaging hosts, has found the meaning
Of that same Death?—

ANTIPAS. Death, death, for ever death!
Can ye not light on other talk? All things
Verge thither now. Dream, speech,—'tis all as one.
Sir, look you, this same prophet,—pah, the smell!
Is this a shambles?

HERODIAS. Good, my lord, be calm.

ANTIPAS. Calm! Touch my pulse; 'tis as an
infant's. Sir,

This prophet that thou sawest, I have seen,
See nothing now but him;—him in my sleep,
In all my waking, him. I sit me down

To me, in tones beyond all mortal tones,
That this is John.

HERODIAS. This is the very pitch
Of a disorder'd fancy. Gentlemen,
I pray you weigh this in your saner minds
As frenzy's stormy work. The prince is troubled
To-night with wild unmeaning'd thoughts; the day
Will bring sweet reason. Meanwhile we will leave
The affairs of state that call'd us, and break up
The council. So good-night.

COUNSELLOR. Most gracious lady,
Our best adieus; and for the king, soft sleep,
And calmer thoughts.

HERODIAS. My thanks unto you all.

(Exeunt all the Council.)

HERODIAS. Now they are gone;
We are alone. Now let us front this ghost,
Summon him forth, look straight into his eyes,
Hear his most dreadest curses, let him do
His best and worst,—and vanish. Here I stand,
I, sane, with mind as clear as noon, and heart
As fearless as the noon. Come, memory, come,
Pale as thou wilt, and lift thy bloody hands,
A-tremble with the passionate, pent up powers

Of imprecation ; meet me here, alone—
Save for this craven prince—here, in this point,
This jutting point of time ;—fair play : I, thou ;
Thou with thy cry of terrors, I—with him—
And do thy fellest. If I sink, I still
Have had my vengeance, drain'd one perfect draught
To the bottom ;—that is done. Canst thou, can all
The mortal hosts of retribution steal
That from me ? Could ye undo that, it were
A punishment indeed. But here I wait,
Calm, all your windy terrors.

ANTIPAS. My brave queen,
Thou wouldst front memory here and end it, or
Be ended. Ah, but memory neither ends,
Nor yet is ended ; rules all places ; there
Is always here ; will never slay, but stabs
With cureless wounds for ever.

HERODIAS. Well, then cast
The blame on me. I won the rapture, let
The guilt be only mine.

ANTIPAS. But where is he
Can parcel guilt, or shift it anywhither ?
If two sin in the garden, and be driven
Therefrom, shall one go forth alone to the waste,
Crush'd 'neath the double weight, and one brush past

The angel with the dread sword at the gate
Of innocence? Vain dream, and cowardly
As vain. Black horrors sometimes wring from me
Unwilling words. Nay, but I have not sunk
So far. Wife, we have sinn'd together, and
What comes will bear together to the end.

HERODIAS. That is thy nobler self; and I with
thee

Will bear what comes to the end.

ANTIPAS. But one word more.

When the dark hour comes on me, and these pangs
Press from me words of eclipse, then thou wilt
know——

HERODIAS. Ay, I shall know. So let it pass. The
years

Have many a golden day in store for thee
And me. Cæsar shall make thee king,
And I shall wear a crown upon my brow.
Sweet, life is full of joys; and all the days
And lands shall speak our ever-growing praise.

(*Exeunt.*)

ACT V.

HEROD in banishment in Gaul.

ANTIPAS. Here now is home ; my lingering feet
have follow'd

The sloping pathway of the sun. The East
Hath given me to the West ; the shining morn
Unto the sombre evening. I, that hoped
To be a king, must end my broken days,
Dispalaced, sceptreless, 'neath foreign skies,
Eating the bitter bread of banishment,
A shadow of myself. So runs the will
Of Cæsar. Thus far man can beat down man,
And every petty Cæsar plays the tyrant
Upon some meaner ; while the unseen Powers
Sport with the little lives of men, and when
The merry game is over, tumble all,
Peasant and prince, into one equal grave
Of night and uttermost forgetfulness.
Lie we on beds of straw or softest down,
Time hath one pillow for us at the close ;
One wrinkled hand the dusky curtain draws,

And snuffs the candle ; and one same gruff voice
Utters the long good-night. We busy men
Are but as children's playthings, which they love
A little hour with childhood's gust and passion ;
Then, wearied with their sameness, toss aside.
Even so the fickle Powers that rule the world
Play with us—for they tire of their high selves—
Lift us and lay us low. And never such
Deep-chested laughter fills the palaces
Of the sated gods, as when our shining schemes,
Wrought with long eager love, in ruins fall.
Power's princeliest pleasure is in misery,
In earth and heaven. Our poor successes wake
Only the corpse-smile of a sneer ; but when
Despair and madness seize us, and the heart
Aches unto breaking nigh, hey then the huge
And rolling merriment of the immortals,
Made drunk with human sorrow. Even now
Such rollicking and billowy rapture shakes
The sleek sides of the iron-bowell'd gods
For me, a would-be king, and proved a worm.

Enter HERODIAS.

HERODIAS. A worm ? Who ? Thou ? A would-
be king ? No king

Can ever be unking'd but by himself
Alone. For every royal-hearted man
Hath a broad empire in his own strong will,
Nor Cæsar, nor the careless gods, nor Fate
Can steal, or even enter. We are here
In exile? So. But draw the circle whole,
And read it thus, that Gaul is far away
From Galilee, but Galilee as far
From Gaul. The wise man schools himself to see
All round the sphere of truth; the fool regards
The bulge presented to him. Here and there
Are names, no more; tricks of the mind, that knows
A subtler method. For where'er we are,
There is the centre, there the happy spot.
Space unto him who thinks is as a cloak,
Which he puts on or off, as pleases him;
And Time the fellow-garment. So to-day
May be a coronation day, and here
The centre city of a greater realm,
Rich in all merchandise, mighty in arms,
Rimm'd by horizons past all reach, and peopled
With the fair teeming myriads of the brain.
Look at it thus.

ANTIPAS.

Ah, but I cannot look
On phantoms. These my eyes have never learn'd

The trick of such fine vision. I but see
What is. Can I behold my castle walls,
The shining armour of my troops, the ranks
Of incense-breathing courtiers, or the land
Which I ruled once? I would give all thy realm
Of dreamy wealth and ghostly populace,
For one hour more of that.

HERODIAS. But which is wiser,—
To live among the phantoms of the past,
Sad-visaged, and their thin speech all a wail;
Or 'mid the joyous fancies of the brain,
Sunlit and musical? Are those thy comrades
Less empty than my friends? There is no cheat
Greater than recollection. He who drinks
The wine the Past will give him, finds the cup
Brimming with tears, the strain'd out bitterness
Of years; old joys, once fresh, turn'd flat and sour,
And sorrows sourer still. Have nought to do
With memory or yesterday; to-day
Hath scope in't for thy utmost thoughts and deeds.

ANTIPAS. But what if memory will have to do
With me? Is she a visitor whom prayer
Can charm away, or the stern sentry Will
Bar from my presence?

HERODIAS, No she will intrude

Her cursed face ; there thou art right. But thou
Seat her not in the chiefest seat, nor bend
Thine ear alone to her funereal speech.
Brief welcome, and affectionate but most
Emphatic farewells,—there thy wisdom is.

ANTIPAS. Easy and cheap it is to see another's
Wisdom.

HERODIAS. And cheaper still it is to take
That which is freely offer'd.

ANTIPAS. But to use !
The knot is there. How many a gift we take,
That lies as lumber in our life !

HERODIAS. Even so.
Thou hast hit the centre ; therein lies the broadest
Severance 'twixt the wise man and the fool.
The wise man knows to use whate'er is given,
Or dark or bright, to his own ends and for
Its little moment, then can see it pass
Without a pang, nor ever troubles more
To call it back.
They come without our calling, the sure Hours,
Each with its own gift ; nor, once gone, will turn
Their onward-looking faces. Why should I
Shrill unto their deaf ears and vanishing robes,
When others come ?

ANTIPAS. Ah, most distinctly other ;
There is the misery oft. What kinsmanship
Have these dull hours with those ? Gifts do they
bring ?

God's curse ! they do ;—longings most impotent,
Sour melancholy, brooding weariness,
And bitter hate. Most glorious gifts ! And we,
Would we be wise, must stretch our hands, and thank
Their curst, impassive faces, and look out
For others yet to come ! I have not compass'd
Such wisdom ; 'tis beyond my reach. I think
Of those dear, dusky Eastern hours that brought
Gifts that were gifts. I find it sweeter now
To pine for them than to rejoice in these.
I am but man, and find no other pleasure
Than to ache for what is lost.

HERODIAS. And I, my lord,
Have I lost nothing ? Thou art wrapt in self.
If thou art but a man, I am a woman ;
I have lost more than thou.

ANTIPAS. More ! Thou ?

HERODIAS. Ay, more ;
Tho' being only woman, not a man,
I scorn to whimper like a puling child
Over old playthings.

ANTIPAS. Well, how more?

HERODIAS. Why, thus;—

Thou hast lost realm and wealth and courtiers' love—
Sweet love!—and princely pomps and power, and
ease,

And fame, and Cæsar's favour,——

ANTIPAS. Ay, thro' thy

Accursed schemes.

HERODIAS. Perchance;—and native skies,

And scenes that love made fairer than they were;—

There is thy loss,—and all of it is mine.

No wound of thine but cuts as deep in me.

One wound there is of mine, more sterner far

And cureless than all these, and thou of that

Feel'st nothing.

ANTIPAS. What?

HERODIAS. The child.

ANTIPAS. Oh, name her not,

The hated wench. It is the one bright thought

In these dark days, that leagues of distance lie

'Twixt her and me.

HERODIAS. Hated! And this to me,

Her mother!

ANTIPAS. Ay, to thee, her mother; hated

With utter hate.

HERODIAS. And I must list to this ?

ANTIPAS. Even so. Hath she not been the curse
to me

Of every curse ? What peace hath been my lot,
Since that mad midnight ? Ha ! thou know'st it well ;
Have not her wanton feet chased peace from me
For ever ? Thoughts of day-time, dreams of dark,—
And always at the centre of them those
Dead eyes that will not die. I thought perchance,
Here, far away from the rank spot, there might
Be respite from them. Poor, wild, empty thought !
They too have travell'd, would not stay behind ;—
Baggage I could not lose. All other things
Are changed in these new western climes, but they
Have the same dreadful sameness ; so that now
Where'er I turn, on whatsoe'er I look,
They come 'twixt me and everything ; I see
Thro' them ; they are my eyes, and colour all
With hopelessness and doom. Queen, as thou
fear'st

For thy own life, name her no more to me.

HERODIAS. Fear'st ! Ha, 'tis a grand word. And
who art thou,
That thou shouldst give commands ? I never fear'd
thee.

When thou wast prince ; and shall I stoop to it
Now, when thou art a broken exile ? Oh !
It is a merry thought. I have not smiled
Since I came hither ; but I needs must tune
My lungs to laughter over such a word.
Name her no more ? Good sir, authority
Mates not with exiles. Wouldst thou have my head ?
Where is thy Captain of the Guard, my sweet
Unsceptred Prince ? Thy own disregal hands
Must do thy slayings now. Yet I must thank thee,
Brave threat'ner, for this weapon,—Name her not.
I shall know how to use it. When thou art
Deep sunk in melancholy, I shall have
Whereby to rouse thee from thy moodiness.
When thou forget'st a husband's courtesy,
Most gentle sir, unto thy gentle wife,
I shall remember this. And when thou say'st
Unloving words, as thou art wont to do,
To loving me, then I shall lash thy black
Embitter'd heart to frenzy, with this one
Most potent word. Oh, how I thank thee for
And thou shalt find how sweet it is to have
A wife who can remember.

ANTIPAS.

Nay, spare not

Thy witching music ; I would hear it still.

HERODIAS. Ay, and thou shalt,—both now and
many a day

To come. I shall be with thee, like those eyes
Of our sweet friend the prophet. Utter hate
Thou spak'st of. 'Tis a tune that's better play'd
By two than one. Two make a fuller discord,
Dear sombre husband. I will join my hate
To thine, and we will make so fell a concert
Shall fright the very Furies. Muse on that.
'Twill take thy brooding thoughts from Galilee
And what has been, to think what is to be.

(Exit HERODIAS.)

ANTIPAS. Here then it ends; I gave myself for
this.

Lame-footed Consequence hath caught me up
After a long pursuit. Ah, guilty love,
Thou hast no calm; thy firmest steps are false
With trembling. Gulp and surfeiting thou art,
Rapture and loathing. Never touch of peace
Is in thy hot embraces, or thy dark
And stealthy whisperings. The light will come,—
Light, fairest and most terrible of things,
God's light, and show thy painted hideousness,—
As it hath come to me. Now here I stand,

Alone, bereft of all ; and not a soul
In all the world will cry, Poor Herod, or
Think one kind thought of me. Nay, I myself,—
So stern the avenging Powers are—cannot cry
Pity upon myself. Wife, Philip, John !
Ye have your last revenge. We learn too late,
That we are little and the Gods are great.

(Exit.)







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